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Vincent de Paul.

LONDON: EDWARD ARNOLD: 1901.

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LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
37 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND
1901

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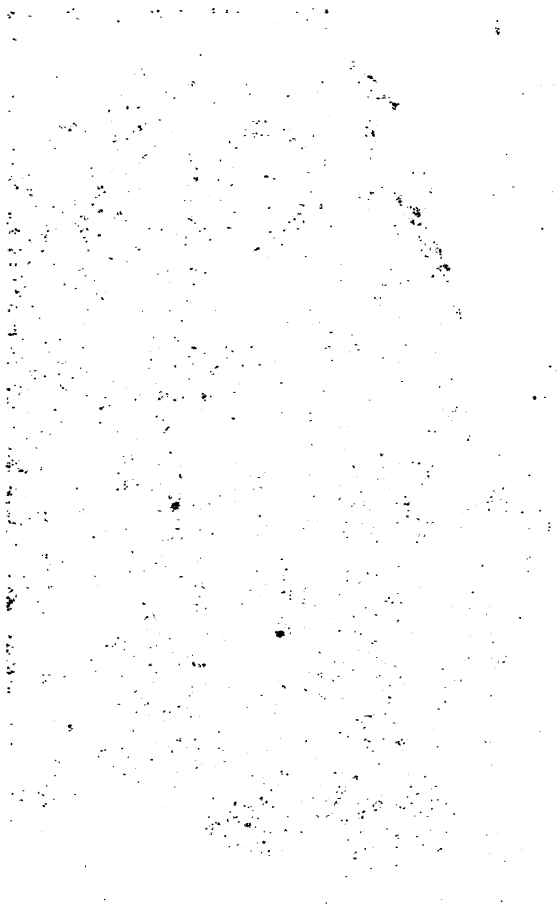

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MONSIEUR VINCENT

A SKETCH OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL REFORMER OF THE 17TH CENTURY

BY

JAMES ADDERLEY

AUTHOR OF "FRANCIS: THE LITTLE POOR MAN OF ASSISI," "STEPHEN REMARX," ETC.

Evangelizare pauperibus misit ME

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
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INTRODUCTION

LIKE "Francis, the Little Poor Man," the first of this series, this is no more than a slight sketch, without any pretension to originality, and put forward with a painful consciousness that it only touches the fringe of a great subject. The lives of S. Vincent are so many and so crammed with details, that it would be quite impossible in a small volume such as this to deal completely with the matter; but it is hoped that there is enough given here to kindle the imagination of the reader, and to make him feel that to know nothing of S. Vincent would be a serious loss to any one to whom a knowledge of the history of the Church and the hope for her advance in the solution of social problems are objects of desire.

The following are some of the chief biographies of, or other books relating to, S. Vincent de Paul :—

1.* *Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul.* Abelly.—This is the oldest Biography. It

* Those marked with an asterisk are the books to which I have chiefly trusted in preparing this volume.

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is really a collective work put together in 1664, four years after S. Vincent's death, by his Mission Priests. Abelly, the Bishop of Rodez, gave his name to the book. The "Abelly" referred to in this book is the modernised edition, entitled *Vie de S. Vincent de Paul.* 2 vols. (Paris, Dumoulin, 1881.)

2. *Vie de S. Vincent de Paul.*—Collet, Prêtre de la Mission. This is the second great Biography, containing more details than the above. It was published in 1748. Collet studied no less than 7000 of S. Vincent's letters. A large part of these was destroyed in the sack of S. Lazare at the Revolution.
3. *Saint Vincent de Paul.*—Abbé Maynard, 4 vols. Published in 1860. This is the most complete Life.
4. *Histoire de S. Vincent de Paul.*—Bougaud, Bishop of Laval. This was published in 1891.
5.* *La Misère au temps de la Fronde et S. Vincent de Paul.* Alphonse Feillet. (Perrin et Cie., Paris, 1886.) This is a first-class book, written in the true, impartial spirit of a scientific historian.
6.* *Mademoiselle le Gras.*—La Comtesse de Richemont. (Poussielgue, Paris, 1894.) This is a beautifully written story of the Filles de la Charité and their first Superior.
7. *Les Lettres de S. Vincent de Paul.* (Paris, Dumoulin, 1882.)
8.* *S. Vincent de Paul.* Emmanuel de Broglie. (Paris, Lecoffre, 1900.) This is by far the best modern handy volume on the subject.

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Besides the above there are for English readers the following :—

1. The translation of Bougaud's Life, by Father Brady. (Longmans.) With a preface by Cardinal Vaughan.
2. The translation of De Broglie's Life in the "Saints" Series (Duckworth).
3. Wilson's Life of S. Vincent de Paul. (Longmans.)

I have also derived help from Sir James Stephens' "Lectures on the History of France," and from his "Ecclesiastical Biographies": from De Morin's *Cardinal de Retz et M. Vincent sous la Fronde* (Paris, 1864): from the "Mémoires of J. F. Cardinal de Retz" (English translation, Nichols, London, 1896), and from Gardiner's "Thirty Years' War" (Epochs of Modern History Series).

J. A.

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MONSIEUR VINCENT

M. VINCENT

WHY attempt another life of S. Vincent de Paul? Why, indeed, when there are at least thirty or forty "Lives," and all of them detailed and complete where this is inadequate and cramped? Because we never tire of the Lives of the Saints: we can read them again and again from different points of view: we can read them in the light of modern problems, and discover fresh lessons that the Spirit of God would teach us in them. The Lives of Saints are for all time, just as are their words: they do not belong to one age but to all ages: nor to one nation: nor to one part of the Church.

No doubt S. Vincent is "very French," as people say, but he is wonderfully human, and therefore somewhat English also. He is a thorough son of the Catholic Church, but that

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does not prevent him from helping the most insular of Anglicans. Yet we Britons are very much afraid of learning anything from a Roman Catholic, and especially from a post-Reformation Papist who lived just at the time when we were screaming at everybody and everything that had to do with Rome.

For this reason, too, it may not be amiss for a Church of England man, albeit a "Ritualistic" one, to commend the life of this holy man to his fellow-religionists.

Once again, S. Vincent was a Christian Social Reformer, and "Christian Socialism" is in the air. It is a good thing for us, who pride ourselves on our progressive ideas and imagine we are "up-to-date" and "twentieth-century men" to discover that many of our most "modern" and "original" methods, both in philanthropy and Church work, were known and in full swing 250 years ago, and emanated from the brain of one man, and that man a poor peasant priest of the French Church.

We admire the capacity and wonder at the genius of men who are able to conceive and carry out just one piece of work in a lifetime: John Howard, the reformer of prisons: John Wesley, the populariser of the Gospel: Lord Shaftesbury, the friend of the over-worked

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women and children: Dr. Pusey, the reviver of the belief in Church and Sacraments. What are we to think of a single man who combined the work of all these and more besides?

It is no exaggeration to say that in the Church we owe wholly or in part, directly or indirectly, to S. Vincent the following precious institutions: Active Communities of Sisters of Mercy, Ten Days' Missions and such like work, Retreats and Quiet Days for both clergy and laity, Theological Colleges and the enlistment of the rich and well-to-do Christians as active workers—for example, as District Visitors, Hospital Visitors, &c. In the State we owe to him the initiation of, or at least the stimulation of, such works as Foundling Hospitals, Workhouses, Casual Wards, Night Shelters, Prison Reform, and Charity Organisation.

I am not conscious that the above is an over-estimate of S. Vincent's work.

Now what sort of man was he? We can picture him to ourselves with his rather rough face, a long, thick nose, a wide mouth, big lips, and heavy figure. Yet it is a striking countenance: his eyes are bright and kindly: he has a sweet smile: there is gentleness and there is firmness in his look. His is "the beauty which the heart gives even to the

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ugliest." A man of extraordinary physical strength: his life being from the very first a rough, hard one. He never spared himself, always rising early and working sometimes into the night: travelling all over the provinces of France: holding the threads of perhaps ten important operations at once, each requiring patience and regularity and close attention. Yet he lived over eighty years, and was starting new work only a few months before his death.

He never became stale or lost heart.[1] His Addresses and Spiritual Letters never seem to betray flagging interest or the advance of despair. He is always good-humoured and patient and recollected. Nothing could disturb him: nothing could unsettle him. He was humble and meek under all circumstances, and that never with the slightest hypocrisy, and never abject or cringing. He could administer a rebuke when necessary. He was not afraid to tell men their faults quite openly. He never forgot he was a priest, yet the thought never made him proud or overbearing: he knew too well what the responsibility of priesthood was to let the thought of it do anything but increase his humility.

[1] See, however, p. 155.

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And, like all the Saints, he knew what sin really was in the sight of God and went softly all the days of his life. But with all his humility he was not weak or flabby. His was the true humility which is strong because it rests in God: it was self-emptying, but the void was filled with Divine power: Christ entered in to guide and uphold that which self had evacuated. His was the meekness that inherits the earth. He denied himself and waited on the Lord, and the Lord renewed his strength again and again. He was like a tree planted by the waterside, quiet and firm, deriving his life from the River of Life, bringing forth his fruit in due season. His leaf did not wither, and, look, whatsoever he did it prospered.

He never put himself forward or asked for any advancement, yet the advance always came at the right time. In an age of universal and most abandoned wirepulling, when the most sacred offices were hawked about in the most unblushing manner, S. Vincent went his way absolutely free from contamination. He exactly fulfilled S. James' requirements of pure religion and undefiled before God. He visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and kept himself unspotted from the world.

We see in S. Vincent a genuine belief in

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vocation. He never suggests, directly or indirectly, that he is "the man for the place," and yet he always turns out to be the only person who could have done the thing that had to be done. The secret is, that he really waits until he is called by God. There is not a vestige of human interference on his part: he is quite passive, taking no step, not even the most obvious and, as most of us would think, legitimate step towards a new work or new sphere of operations — no, always the humble, retiring, submissive saint who has to be drawn out and almost forced into it. But once clearly called, he obeys and enters heartily into the work. Few men have had a greater capacity for business, few have possessed a clearer head or sounder judgment.

Just as among commercial men there are some, head and shoulders above the rest, who have a genius for trading. Perfectly honest and straightforward, they yet rise far above the rest through sheer force of generalship, insight, foresight, and power of application. So S. Vincent stands among the great men of the Church: the most successful of organisers, a general commanding vast charitable armies of men and women, handling enormous sums of money; the life and soul of countless schemes

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in Paris, the provinces of France, and in almost every country of Europe and beyond it: yet, for all that, much more than an organiser. He is not merely a genius who would have shone in any walk of life, but who happened to find himself in the Church and so shone there: not merely one who, if he had been a statesman, would have been Prime Minister, or, if he had been a soldier, would have been Commander-in-Chief. No doubt this would have been the case, but with S. Vincent it is more: it is ecclesiastical success founded upon genuine Christianity, as all ecclesiastical success should be. It is sanctified genius. He is so holy, so full of love: that is mainly why he succeeds. He helps the poor because he loves them in Christ: he provides for the convicts because they are his brothers under God; he rescues the little foundlings because they are Christ's children: he calls upon the rich to give themselves and their money to God, because he cannot conceive any other course as open to Christians who are rich: he converts Protestants, because he cannot bear to think of their being deprived of the dear Sacraments he loves so well: he pleads with the clergy to be converted, because he is so thoroughly converted himself, and is rejoicing

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in Jesus and knows the power of grace. And all this with extraordinary common sense and tact, and resourcefulness and wisdom, and humanity, and even humour. Truly it is a beautiful life.

Probably S. Paul alone is more many-sided than S. Vincent. S. Paul was pre-eminent in almost every department of ecclesiastical activity: a great missionary, a great organiser: a great theologian: a great pastor: a great master of the spiritual life and director of souls. S. Vincent, too, was all this except, perhaps, a theologian. He was not a constructive theologian, nor were his sermons conspicuously doctrinal. But even this was not from any desire to put theology in a secondary place.

He was not like so many modern Christian philanthropists who fondly imagine that works of charity must go hand in hand with a general haziness as regards dogmatic belief. S. Vincent was a champion of the Catholic Faith, and was ready to defend it whenever to defend it came in his way.

Moreover, the very foundation of his philanthropy was this same Faith once delivered to the Saints. It was because of his definite creed that he did the work he did.

Now, what exactly did S. Vincent aim at and effect? He had to deal with a corrupt

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Church, an ignorant and, to an alarming degree, an immoral clergy, a town and country population burdened with poverty and distress of abnormal character, widespread unbelief in, and suspicion of, Catholic doctrine, a bad tradition in ecclesiastical matters.

On the other hand, there was a natural reaction setting in after the struggles of the Reformation: there was a great desire for reform within the Church: there were a considerable number of earnest, devout persons, both laity and clergy, who were looking out for leaders and outlets for their zeal. What was needed was organisation and regulation, and, above all, faith and hope.

Here was S. Vincent's opportunity. He had the capacity to organise: he knew how to marshal his forces and to set men and women to work, and he possessed unbounded faith in God, in the Church, and in the materials and the tools which he had to handle. Unlike the Jansenists, who were also would-be reformers, S. Vincent saw no need to burden himself with a battle about doctrines. The old faith as he knew it was all he wanted. The Church as she was furnished him with all his weapons. He had but to commend the Catholic religion to men as a living, active

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principle. Let the priests be priests, good priests, faithful, dutiful, converted men, and the stray sheep would come home. Let the old watchwords be spoken again by men and women who really believed them, and the Kingdom of God would immediately appear.

First and foremost, then, the feet of the messengers themselves must be shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace. This explains all his efforts towards the *formation du clergé*, the Retreats, the Conférences, the Seminaries, &c.

"Sacerdotalism," if rightly understood, is a most blessed thing. It meant in the hands of S. Vincent the same as "Pastoral work." Priests were to come between God and man, not to keep man from God, but to bring God to man and man to God. Priests were to be mediators within the Person of the One Mediator, Jesus Christ.

The Confessional was to be the means of rescuing poor sinners and bringing them to the feet of Jesus' Cross, there to lay down their burden and know as their own the blessed certainty of pardon through the Precious Blood.

The Divine Church was the Body of Christ, within whose motherly embrace men found the

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Life of the Sacred Humanity active as of old, consoling, nourishing, invigorating. Food for the body, food for the soul, a refuge from the storm, a haven of rest for the hungry, the weary, the outcast, the unhappy.

All this and much more was in the midst of the people, and they could have it for the asking.

And "the Church" to S. Vincent meant the whole body of Catholics, laity as well as clerics. Here was a huge machine for good work and a blessed life ready to hand, and only needing to be cleansed, oiled, and set in motion. Few Church reformers have made so much use of the Christian laity as did S. Vincent, both of rich and poor. His *Confréries* were composed of all classes and both sexes, his *Dames de Charité* were drawn from the aristocracy, his *Filles de Charité* from the peasantry.[1]

And as with the priests so with the lay-workers; they must be holy people, themselves converted believers, purged from their old sins, filled with the love of Jesus. There must be Retreats and Missions for them: they must have Rules of Life: they must be regular at Prayer and Confession and Communion: they must know what they want to bring to others.

[1] Many of the Sisters could not read.

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Yet they must not be a separate caste, holding aloof from their fellow-men and only descending upon them from a height. They must not be mere "ladies bountiful," patronisers, giving money without soiling their fingers with the practical work of ministry. They must visit the poor and the sick: they must know them as friends: they must rejoice with them and weep with them: making their beds, cooking their food, nursing their babies, and attending their funerals. Even the "Sisters" must not be "Nuns," enclosed and occupied exclusively with their own salvation: they must come out into the street, they must go about doing good, spending and being spent for their brothers and sisters. All Christians must help one another according to their ability. The rich ladies come forward and pay the expenses of the poor who want a Retreat. The Royal Family itself is practically interested in the spiritual and temporal welfare of the very humblest. And yet none of this is looked upon by S. Vincent as anything surprising or abnormal. It is just what he expects all Christians will want to do if only it is suggested to them and they are told how. It is just the Christian Church at work, no more, no less. It is the Body of Christ, still alive: the Risen Saviour walking in the

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midst of the golden candlesticks: it is Galilee and Samaria, Jerusalem and Bethany, reproduced in Paris and Picardy. It is the "Acts of the Holy Apostles" still in progress. And all this is worked in conjunction with or rather springs from the holy Sacraments themselves. They are no dumb, dark ceremonies: they are spirit and they are life. Fresh from the daily Eucharist: fresh from the sprinkling of the Precious Blood in Mass and Absolution, S. Vincent's emissaries go forth to minister, and the Sacred Heart is felt to be beating in men's midst, and the Holy Hands are there to heal and succour. Madame Lamoignon said that M. Vincent had done "more than twenty saints put together."

Yet his work was never what is vulgarly called a "one-man show." Not only were there remarkable persons associated with him, who would have been conspicuous even without him, especially women like Madame de Gondy and Mademoiselle le Gras, but he set all his subordinates to work, enthusing them with his spirit and giving them a real practical share in the operations. The *esprit de corps* which he produced amongst all with whom he worked was most powerful, and is witnessed to by the permanence of his institutions. In this

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he was more successful than S. Francis of Assisi. True, the Franciscan Order still exists, but 250 years after its founder's death it did not exhibit his spirit in the same way as from all accounts the Congregation of Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity retain S. Vincent's spirit to-day.

S. Vincent, like many other reformers, also succeeded by saying and doing exactly the thing that wanted saying and doing at that particular period.

It was not the time for starting a new Religious Order of the old type. The monasteries were in bad odour, not only among Protestants but among Catholics also. The salt had lost its savour. Not only was there loose living in some of them, and the glaring scandal of the appointment of youthful abbats and abbesses, but there was notorious misappropriation of funds.[1]

Moreover, it was becoming more and more clear that Religious Orders must justify their existence by doing some useful work outside the walls of their abbeys and the solitude of their own individual lives. The Jesuits were,

[1] There was one case of a hospital that for forty years had received no sick people, and had used the money "for the Order." Another where 20,000 livres left for the education of children had been similarly embezzled.

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of course, hard at work showing what could be done in the field of education. M. Vincent was called by God to show what could be done in the field of charitable work and social reform. The peculiarity of S. Vincent's reforms was, says M. Feillet, "the predominance of the practical and social elements over the ascetic[1] and individualistic; the passion for instruction, care of the suffering, the necessity of having an useful end for an active life."[2]

We must not gather from this that Vincent was a mere tactician who planned his novel communities as a set-off against the old-fashioned Orders. He never planned anything. He simply put himself in the hands of God. The Holy Spirit planned the reformation which Vincent carried out. The point is that success attended him because God raised him up at that particular period, and he responded to the call.

"The poor had the Gospel preached to them." That was the secret. When the Church sets itself to that work, the old conquering power of the Lord is felt at once. It was felt in the early Franciscan days: it was

[1] It was rather that he enlarged the field of asceticism and taught it in its true sense.

[2] Feillet, p. 208.

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felt again in S. Vincent's Missions. And he really loved the poor. "He is the Apostle," says M. Feillet again, "of a cause which interests humanity in that which it knows best, that which is most touching, most terrible, the cause of the poor."[1]

Himself the son of a peasant, a fact he never forgot nor let others forget, he devoted himself to them as a class. He loved the tough souls of the rustics ("*les âmes calleuses*," "*ceux qui ne savent où aller ni que faire; c'est la mon poids et ma douleur*"). He pitied the lost and the wandering.

And he respected them profoundly. There was no hypocrisy about this. The poor were "his lords." "If there are any real virtues anywhere," he said, "you will find them among the poor people: they are so patient." "You wretch," he would say to himself, "have you earned the bread you are eating: the bread which comes to you from the labour of these poor people?"[2]

The poor to him were not "masses" to be dealt with in a lump, nor "cases" to be analysed for statistical or economic purposes: they were the souls and bodies for whom the Lord had

[1] Feillet, p. 205.
[2] See M. de Morin, "C. de Retz et M. Vincent."

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poured out His own Soul and sacrificed His own Body in life and death: they were the Lord Himself, hungry and thirsty, and naked and imprisoned, asking for love and care.

Now this great "girding up of the loins" of the Church on behalf of the poor to save them in body and soul was exactly calculated to produce a "Counter-Reformation." The Church had lost ground just because it had failed so conspicuously where all men expected it to show itself active and alert. If the Christian Church cannot deal with poverty and ignorance, men fear it has forfeited its claim to represent the Son of Man, who went about doing good. But whenever the Church chooses to rouse itself and to come out as the "friend of publicans and sinners," the common people will always hear it gladly as they heard the Lord.

Yet again we must not think that M. Vincent devoted himself to the poor at the expense of neglecting the rich. He was too good a Churchman for that. He believed in the rich, and that not of course as mere money-bags into which he could dip his fingers and draw for the relief of the poor: pre-eminently not *that*. He believed in the rich as part of Christ's Church, and therefore as having souls to be saved and a work to do for the Lord. We have noticed

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how he made use of them and set them to work, but we must consider also how careful he was for their salvation. He took them seriously. He never indulged in vulgar abuse of them, as many modern social reformers do, but he dealt with them gently and patiently, showing them what a splendid opportunity they had, and kindling their imagination as to what they might do with their wealth and leisure. His own utter unworldliness enabled him to tell the rich very plainly what their faults were. In the midst of bloody horrors and moral darkness, we find the heroism of M. Vincent shining brightly: self-denial and meekness in the midst of ferocity and selfishness.

He is a wonderful instance of the force of character as being quite independent of circumstances. We know how commonly it is said that the rich can only be approached by one of their own class and education. Yet in S. Vincent we have an instance of a poor countryman, a shepherd who had minded the sheep in old days, able to live in a grand house and talk to a grand aristocrat about his faults, and even to penetrate into the royal presence itself and talk as simply and effectually as if among the poor.

There is a passage in George Herbert's

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"Country Parson"[1] which reads as if it might have been written by S. Vincent himself, treating of this matter of the priest among the rich, which it may not be out of place to quote here. Speaking of chaplains, he says:—

"Before they are in orders they may be received for companions or discoursers; but after a man is once minister, he cannot agree to come into any house where he shall not exercise what he is unless he forsake his plough and look back. Wherefore they are not to be over-submissive and base, but to keep up with the lord and lady of the house, and to preserve a boldness with them and all, even so far as reproof to their very face, when occasion calls, but seasonably and discreetly. They who do not thus while they remember their earthly lord, do much forget their heavenly; they wrong the priesthood, neglect their duty, and shall be so far from that which they seek with their over-submissiveness and cringing that they shall ever be despised. They who for hope of promotion neglect any necessary admonition or reproof sell (with Judas) their Lord and Master."

Of M. Vincent's extraordinary humility it is scarcely necessary to particularise. The story of his life is the proof it. Suffice it to say that he was for ever reminding others that he was ignorant, a country bumpkin and a sinner. He was "a fourth form boy," "only a shepherd,"

[1] "Country Parson," chap. ii. George Herbert was contemporary with, and in many ways resembled S. Vincent.

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"the chief of sinners." He was always sincerely afraid that some one should wish to join the Congregation who would expect more refinement and comfort than they could offer him. "We are only poor labourers," he said to one. But with all his poverty, he was never untidy or unclean in dress or appearance. His cassock might be threadbare and his hat old, but they were clean.

"What a ragamuffin I look!" he said once, on glancing at himself in the glass at the King's palace. Certainly he had that "saving sense of humour" which is often so sadly needed among religious people. His addresses are lit up with sparks of genuine fun. He is never brutally sarcastic, but his words must have come home with peculiar force, and made some persons a little uncomfortable sometimes: for the great good of their souls, no doubt, as they would have been the first to acknowledge.[1]

It only remains to ask ourselves in what way S. Vincent's life can help us in view of modern social and ecclesiastical problems. What has been already written will have partly suggested the answer.

[1] I have noticed other traits in S. Vincent's character in the body of the book, and much of what I have written in this chapter appears again in connection with the facts of his life.

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And first of all, S. Vincent, like many other great saints, is a perpetual inspiration, an encouragement. In this age especially we need to be encouraged, when the love of many has waxed cold, and the mass of people have ceased to look to the Church to lead them. The opportunity has not passed by. On the contrary, the almost total failure of secular social reformers to inspire and encourage their fellowmen, the fact that almost all the reforming agencies which show signs of life and progress make some claim to be Christian, all lead us to believe that we only need more Churchmen who really believe in Christ and His Church to bring back our countrymen to faith and therefore true progress.

It is just the happy, buoyant spirit of a S. Vincent which we want, who dares, in the midst of the darkness, to light the old light of true Christianity and apply it to the brightening of the lives, both inward and outward, of the masses of the people: who boldly disbelieves in and renounces the world, and preaches the Kingdom of Heaven: who does not hesitate to show by word and deed that he believes and knows that the real advance of humanity is by way of redemption from sin and new life in Christ: who surprises the scoffers by showing that to be

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heavenly-minded does not mean to live in the clouds, but to be concerned about the welfare of every human being, be he convict or bishop, starving babe or prince of the blood royal, beggar or duke: who busies himself equally with retreats and diplomacy, general confessions, and cheap soup.

Is it not just what we need in modern England, to have a Church that is a holy priesthood: at the head of it clergy who know their business, their "priest-craft" in the literal sense: men who will cease to worship the external idol of the "Book of Common Prayer," and will begin to imbibe its spirit: who will fast and pray and catechise and celebrate the Holy Mysteries: who will make their parish churches the homes of God's flock: who will deal with starving souls rather than with obsolete rubrics: who will accommodate themselves to the intellectual level of their congregations and speak to them in language which they can understand, aiming at that very *rusticité* of which S. Vincent was so fond: who will before all things see to it that the elements of the Christian religion are taught to every little child?[1] Above all, to have holy priests ministering at our altars: men who will

[1] See a most suggestive article by C. L. Marson in *Commonwealth*, July 1901.

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not think it waste of time to spend a few days in silent retreat, at least once a year, to get alone with God in the midst of "the barrenness of busy life": men who have been chosen from all ranks of society, and that not only because of intellectual sharpness, but chiefly because they are devout believers, men who have a message to perishing souls because they know themselves what it is to have been brought from the power of Satan unto God.

Do we not need, too, a vast increase of missionary, evangelising work, and therefore some such system as S. Vincent's by which trained preachers can go all through the country districts supplementing the ordinary parochial work by a sane and scientific revivalism: not merely stirring up emotions and exciting people with hymns and pulpit fireworks, but patiently recalling them to penitence and a sober realisation of the eternal truths: John the Baptists, who will prepare the way of the Lord by careful diagnosis of each spiritual ailment as the multitude comes before them: missionaries who will hand on to the parish clergy a body of candidates for confirmation and communion, of lost sheep reclaimed and new seekers after pardon? Moreover, that this "holy priesthood" should be understood to consist of all "the saints," both men and women:

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that a place should be found in the living, active Church of God for all who have been baptized.

When we hear, as we do hear often in these days, of "Church Reform" and the representation of the laity in the councils of the Church, do we realise that for vast masses of nominal Church people the whole idea of the Church as a corporate organisation is a hidden mystery, and largely because so many of them have never been encouraged to take any share in its work? Can we not learn something from S. Vincent's genuine belief in the lay person? More especially could we not imitate him in the provision he made for the rich in the economy of Church life? I do not refer so much to the opportunities he gave them for visiting and "slumming": I suppose we in England are not remiss in that. I refer rather to the efforts which he put forth for their spiritual benefit.

Why do we never, or scarcely ever, send "missions" to "rich" churches? Why do we spend so little energy in teaching the children of the upper classes the rudiments of religion? Why are we so chary of getting at close quarters with the souls of those in "high society"? Is it not true that gentlemen who call themselves Churchmen, and especially if they have titles and subscribe largely to Church work, are seldom

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asked if they have closed with the primary offers of Christ in the Gospel, and too often know very little about repentance and the grace of the Sacraments? Would it be such a wildly impossible thing to have a "St. Lazare" in London, where men and women of all classes could learn to rest and pray and know what God they worship?

The enormous extension of philanthropic effort in these days may turn out a snare both to rich and poor if it is not founded, as it used to be founded, on a love of Christ and a belief in grace. The conversion of philanthropists, the spiritualising of slummers, the humbling of the almsgiver, this is what we need, and this is what S. Vincent inspires us to look for.

Lastly, let us learn from S. Vincent's passion for organisation. No doubt we are learning in these days to organise our charitable efforts, and in many ways we do it better than S. Vincent, because we know more of the causes of poverty than he did. But much of our zeal is still unregulated, and we like to have it so. S. Vincent teaches us that it is no sign of being a Christian philanthropist to be indiscriminate and unmethodical. S. Vincent, had he lived in these days, would have had all his same love for the poor and disregard of self, but I venture to think he would have been amongst those who

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take pains to inquire into the causes of distress and the likelihood of the benefits that might accrue, or the reverse, from the giving of alms. He would be in favour of patient research work: he would have insisted on Christian employers showing a good example in the conduct of their business: he would have studied the Temperance Problem, and the Housing Problem, and the Sweating Problem, and such like.

He would have "agitated" in a Christian way. He would have made use of the Legislature to further his reforms. He would have been a good citizen, regular at the polling booth, municipal and parliamentary. He would, like Lord Shaftesbury, have belonged to no political party. Like Arnold Toynbee, he would have desired no notoriety, but only "that he might hunger and thirst after righteousness."

One thing he would not have done. He would not have sat down in despair and washed his hands of all attempts at social reform or interest in the problem of poverty under cover of a desire to lead a so-called "spiritual life." He would not have been content to say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," without doing something by prayer, by practical activity, by love unfeigned to let God arise and His enemies be scattered.

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EARLY YEARS

S. VINCENT DE PAUL was born on the 24th of April in the year 1576, at Ranguines, Pouy, near Dax,[1] near Bayonne. His father was Jean de Paul, his mother Bertrande de Moras. They were humble peasants, upright and good. Vincent was the youngest but one of six children, two girls and four boys. Like David and the prophet Amos, he minded the sheep. He was never ashamed of his origin, in fact, he was fond of calling attention to it. He was "nourished by poverty, which he in his turn would nourish." There can be little doubt that it was his early life in the country that made him so fond of the rural population of France, and so anxious to bring them the consolations of religion by his own hands and by the hands of a reformed and active priesthood. When quite young we read of him giving alms to the poor: on one occasion he is said to have given away all he had, some thirty sous. His father saw the bent of his mind, and most prudently resolved to sacri-

[1] Formerly spelt *d'Acqs*, i.e. *de Aquis*.

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fice much in order to give him a good education.

When he was twelve years old, he was put to school under the Franciscan Fathers at Dax, with whom he learnt Latin. After four years he attracted the attention of a M. de Commet, a lawyer of Dax, who engaged him as tutor to his boys. He was so successful in this, and showed such signs of devoutness, as well as of general ability, that M. de Commet advised him to take Holy Orders. In 1596, at the age of twenty, he received minor orders at Bidache, near Bayonne. Soon afterwards he entered the university of Saragossa, but finding it unsuitable, he removed to Toulouse, where he remained seven years. His education was paid for by great self-sacrifice on the part of his father, and by the ready assistance of M. de Commet. His father on one occasion had to sell two of his oxen to provide Vincent with the means to continue his course. But it was a very hard struggle, and it became necessary for the young man to seek a holiday tutorship to add to his slender income. He became the teacher of the two sons of the Baron de Flammarens, Hébrard de Grosolles, Lord of Buzet. He always impressed the parents of any children entrusted to his care as one who could be depended on to

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love and protect them, and they were always willing to hand them over to him with the utmost confidence. He was allowed to take the two boys with him back to Toulouse, and so successful was he in gaining their affection, that he ventured to invite others to join them. He became, in fact, the head of a little school, a "Pensionnat" of upper-class boys. Meantime he continued to pursue his own theological studies. In the year 1598 he was ordained Deacon, and in the same year his good father died.

Vincent refused to avail himself of any of the legacies which his father left him. Thus we see him from the very first to have been truly poor in spirit. He knew that God was providing for him by his ever-increasing number of friends and patrons, and he felt that whatever his father left would be more wanted by the other members of his family; though it must not be supposed that he was in any way "well off," in fact, very much the contrary.

On 23rd September 1600, at the age of twenty-four, he was ordained Priest by the Bishop of Périgueux, and celebrated the Holy Communion for the first time a few days later at the little Chapel of Our Lady of Grace, near Buzet.

His friend, M. de Commet, wished him to

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have the parish of Thil near Dax, but there was another priest who was seeking it, and rather than have a contest about the nomination, Vincent declined the offer and went back to Toulouse for another four or five years' course of study.

The year 1605 was an eventful one in his life. He had been to Bordeaux, and on his way back to Toulouse he learned that a pious lady had died, after making him her heir. The property consisted of some land, yielding a very small income, and some articles of furniture. Finding that there was a debtor who owed the estate some money, and had fled to Marseilles to escape payment, Vincent pursued him thither and obtained a part of what was owed. This was in July 1605. Being about to return to Toulouse by land, he met some one who persuaded him to go by sea as far as Narbonne with him. On the way he fell into the hands of some Turkish pirates, who sold him as a slave. The letter which he wrote to M. de Commet to reassure his friends, who had completely lost sight of him, contains a vivid account of this interesting part of his life, describing how he was publicly exposed for sale in Barbary like a horse, purchased first by a fisherman, then by an alchemist, who taught him all sorts of

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medicinal secrets, then by a renegade of Nice, one of whose wives was attracted by Vincent's religion and persuaded her husband to return to Christianity.

This letter[1] was found fifty years afterwards, and a copy was sent to Vincent de Paul just two years before his death. He burnt it, no doubt because it redounded to his credit, and his humility would not let him willingly publish anything of the kind. He tried to get hold of the original, but, fortunately for us, his friends managed to prevent his obtaining it. May we not see in this period of exciting adventure the hand of God, educating the young priest, giving him a practical experience of human nature, bringing him in contact with suffering and hardship, an experience which all went to form his sympathetic character, and to fit him for the difficult work to which he was being called in the Church of Christ?

After his release Vincent was taken to Rome, where he studied until the latter part of the year 1608. Montorio, the Vice-Legate at the Roman Court, was his principal friend and protector. He was much impressed by Vincent and foresaw a great future for the young priest. He introduced him to the French Ambassador

[1] The whole letter is in Abelly, p. 19.

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at Rome, Cardinal du Perron, who was so taken with him that he entrusted to him a secret message to King Henry IV., which he was not willing to send by letter.

This was in the early part of 1609. Vincent went to the Louvre. It would have been interesting to us if he had become intimately acquainted with the great king. But he was too humble for this. He delivered his message, and at once quitted the palace to take up his abode in a little room in the Faubourg S. Germain, and to devote himself to works of charity, visiting the sick and poor. He shared this apartment with the magistrate of a small town of Vincent's native province.

One day his fellow-lodger had gone out, leaving some money in a drawer, which during his absence was stolen by a messenger who was bringing some medicine to Vincent, who happened to be ill in bed at the time. On discovering his loss the magistrate accused Vincent of the theft, and went about everywhere spreading the report of what had occurred. The good priest was very meek under the disgraceful accusation, and it was some time before his character was cleared. Eventually, the thief being on his death-bed, and conscience-stricken at what he had done,

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confessed his fault to the magistrate, who in his turn was covered with confusion, and sought out Vincent at once to beg his pardon for the cruelty of the charges he had so carelessly made against him. This story was a very favourite one of Vincent's in after years. He would tell it in the third person and anonymously—a custom he always observed, so as not to draw attention to himself.

It was at this period of his life that he first met M. de Bérulle, the founder and Superior General of the French Oratorian priests, afterwards a Cardinal. M. de Bérulle became his director, and in many ways, as we shall see, guided the future course of his life. It is most remarkable, though not surprising to those who believe in God's protecting care of those who love Him and pray to Him, that Vincent fell in with a succession of good friends—friends of great discernment, who exactly saw what the next move in his career should be, and who persuaded him to do and undertake what his humility and diffidence would always have prevented him from doing on his own initiative.

It was probably through M. de Bérulle that Vincent was introduced to Jacques Dufresne, the secretary of Queen Margaret of Valois, the divorced wife of Henri IV., who was living in

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her palace in the Rue de Seine, surrounded by a brilliant circle of literary and artistic celebrities. The Queen was much struck by Vincent and made him her chaplain, procuring for him at the same time a small living, the Cistercian Abbey of Bernard de Chaume, in the diocese of Saintes. The date of his appointment to this was 10th June 1610. Of course the humble priest did not live at the palace, but his new work brought him into contact with the highest society of Paris. This was the beginning of his ministry among the rich and cultured. He learned to pity those in high position, to see and to sympathise with their difficulties. It was while he was Queen's chaplain that he met a certain doctor of the Sorbonne who was afflicted with serious doubts about religion. So terrible was his perplexity that he found himself unable to celebrate Mass or to say his Office. This was just the kind of case that would appeal to the heart of Vincent. He prayed to God that he might be allowed to suffer any trial, even doubt itself, for the sake of this poor brother. Then a most mysterious result came about. Peace of mind came to the learned doctor once more, and the awful mist of doubt closed in upon the soul of Vincent. Four years are said to have passed before relief

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came to him. During that sad time he would keep a copy of the *Credo* near his heart, and press it or cross himself when the attacks came on. He never left off his works of charity, but went on, meekly accepting God's answer to his prayer. At last one day he knelt down and solemnly vowed to devote himself to Jesus Christ in the persons of His poor and suffering members. Again God heeded his prayer, and the load was removed in answer to his sacrifice.

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BEGINNINGS OF MISSION WORK

VINCENT DE PAUL desired to get a quiet home where he could say his prayers and find his vocation. The place was found for him by M. de Bérulle in Le Petit-Bourbon, the house of the Oratorians in the Rue Faubourg Saint-Jacques. There De Bérulle had opened the Oratory, and was living with that company of devout priests, the first members of the French Congregation, Sénault, Bence, Condren, and others. Though Vincent lived with them, he never had any intention of joining the Oratorians. His friend, M. de Bérulle, did not press him to do so: he had foresight to perceive that God had other things in store for Vincent. In fact, he even prophesied that Vincent would found a new Congregation of his own. But he had no wish to hurry on matters. The first thing he deemed necessary was that Vincent should gain some experience in parish work. He accordingly took Father François Bourgoing, the priest of Clichy, into

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the Oratory, and arranged for him to choose Vincent as his successor in the parish. Much against his inclination, Vincent acceded to the wishes of his director, and took charge of the place on 2nd May 1612. It was a district of poor people, with a small contingent of well-to-do business men living in villas. Vincent entered heart and soul into the work, and at once exhibited his innate genius for Church work and organisation. He went about doing good, visiting the poor, nursing the sick, making their beds, washing them, clothing them.

Though he had gone to Clichy against his will, there is no doubt that he spent some of the happiest days of his life there. In the short space of a year he was able to collect sufficient funds for the entire rebuilding of the church, and for its furnishing with everything needed for Divine service. The church is still to be seen, though now it is in the midst of Paris streets. It was at this time that he laid the foundations of his work for the reform of the clergy by collecting some dozen boys, who seemed to him to have vocations to the ministry, and bringing them up in his own house.

But De Bérulle did not intend that Vincent should end his days as a parish priest. The opportunity soon came for another move, this

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time a very important one in its consequences. Emmanuel de Gondy, Comte de Joigny, General of the Galleys, son of the Marshal Duc de Retz, was looking out for a tutor for his boys, and consulted De Bérulle. Vincent's kind director saw at once that this would give his spiritual son the very opening he needed, and he bade him go. This was the great turning-point in Vincent's life. The Count and his wife became his great patrons and protectors, and were really the instruments in God's hands to make Vincent what he afterwards became. The humble priest left his dear people at Clichy with very great sorrow, and entered the Hôtel de Gondy.

This was in the year 1613. Vincent was thirty-seven years of age when he took up his abode in this brilliant aristocratic house, where day by day and night by night a succession of visitors assembled from all departments of the highest society of Paris, the Church, the Army, and the Royal Court.

The master of the house, Philippe de Gondy, was very rich, and devoted to his profession, to his religion, to art and literature. He was a most affectionate husband, and seems to have shown a spotless example in the midst of a corrupt society. His wife, Françoise Marguerite

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de Silly, Madame de Gondy, combined beauty and talents, great sanctity and enthusiasm for good works. She was one of the leaders of that remarkable band of Christian ladies which did so much for the revival of Church life in France at that period, proving the possibility of living in the midst of the smartest society and yet keeping oneself unspotted by the world. Not that this is an easy thing to do, nor as easy as many modern fashionable ladies seem to think it.

With Madame de Gondy religion was a very real matter indeed. It meant not only doing works of charity, even on a large scale, and personally inquiring into cases between one poor person and another, and seeing that justice was done, but also regular self-discipline, submission to spiritual direction, and the acquisition of the spirit of penitence. In seeking for a tutor for her boys, she desired above all things to find one who would guide and guard their souls. "I would much rather have my boys made saints than great lords," she said.

It seems a pity that her little Paul was too young at that time to be influenced by the new tutor. He became afterwards the notorious Cardinal de Retz, one of the most profligate characters of the day, redeemed only by the fact that he did not attempt to conceal his sin-

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fulness, but has recorded it in his celebrated Memoirs.[1] The two elder brothers, Pierre and Henri, were the immediate objects of Vincent's care. Pierre, the future Duke of Retz, was then eleven years old: Henri was destined for holy orders, but died prematurely. They were high-spirited, somewhat boisterous lads, and Vincent had great difficulty in keeping them in order.

His whole behaviour in this grand house was most wonderful. He never forgot that he was the priest, and yet, as is generally the case with those who have no doubts about the magnitude of their office, he was deeply humble and beautifully meek. He was fond of reminding people that he was only a village peasant's son and had minded the sheep. He moved about among this aristocratic household as a kind of angel of Heaven, giving a good word of advice here, a cheery bit of encouragement there, yet never being found out of place or impertinent. He showed a profound respect to the master, whom he looked upon as representing God, and to his mistress as representing the Blessed Virgin Mother. Yet he could speak out bravely when required, as is shown by the story of what he did when it came to his knowledge that M. de Gondy was about to fight a duel. As was a favourite

[1] See Mémoires (Nichol's translation), ii. p. 44.

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practice of his, he used to tell the story in after years in the third person, concealing the names of the real actors. It was as follows:—

"I knew a chaplain once, who, having heard that his master intended to go out and fight a duel, after he had celebrated the Holy Mass, when the congregation had gone out, went and knelt by his master, who had remained alone on his knees in the chapel, and there said to him: 'Permit me, if you please, to say a word in all humility. I know on good authority that you intend to go out and fight a duel, but I tell you in the name of my Saviour, Whom I have now been showing to you and Whom you have just adored, that if you do not give up this wicked intention, He will bring His judgment upon you and on your posterity.' Having said that, the chaplain retired; and in that you will remark, if you please, first, the opportuneness of the moment which he chose in which to speak; and second, the terms he used, for these are the two things which one must particularly attend to on such occasions."[1]

. . . . . .

We must now relate the origin of the mission work which Vincent de Paul inaugurated. We for whom "Ten Days' Missions" and "Special Revival Missions" are common experiences, seldom reflect that this particular method of preaching the Gospel and doing God's work is part of what we owe to this faithful Roman Catholic priest. He had gone with the family

[1] Abelly, I. chap. vii.

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to one of their country places, Folleville in Picardy, and as usual had been assisting Madame de Gondy in visiting the rich and poor. Amongst others they visited a poor old man who was persuaded to make a general life's confession.

"Ah! Madame," said the old man, "I should have been lost if I had not made my general confession, on account of several great sins which I had never dared confess before."

The old man had often made his confession, but there were many deadly sins which he had up till then concealed. Now he publicly confessed, not only to Vincent, but to Madame de Gondy herself.

This case made a very great impression on the priest and the lady. "Ah! Monsieur," she said, "what is this which we have just heard? No doubt it is the same with the majority of people. If this man, who passed for a good man, was in a state of damnation, what must be the case of those others who are living more wicked lives? Ah! M. Vincent, how many souls are being lost, and what a remedy we have here!"

This was in January 1617, and on the Feast of the Conversion of S. Paul, a day ever afterwards kept as an annual festival by Vincent and his followers, he preached a sermon in the

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church at Folleville, exhorting every one to make a general confession. Every one came and did so. Vincent proceeded to instruct them and prepare them for communion, but the work which all this entailed was so heavy that it was necessary to call in the assistance of the Jesuit Fathers from Amiens to hear confessions and preach.

This was literally the first "mission," in the modern sense, and so effective was the method found to be that it was repeated in all the other villages on the Gondy estates and elsewhere. Madame de Gondy, seeing the good effect of these general confessions, especially among the country people, resolved to endow any community with 16,000 francs if the priests would undertake to preach missions every five years on her estate. The Jesuits and Oratorians being unable to undertake it, she settled the amount on Vincent de Paul, placing it, as he said, "at the disposal of this wretch."

Not many months after this beginning of missions, for some unknown reason, possibly because he felt he was not altogether successful in curbing the high spirits of his young pupils, or because the esteem in which he was held offended his humility, or because he was afraid of the temptations to worldliness which life in

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even the best regulated of rich houses inevitably presents, or because he wanted to detach Madame de Gondy from a too great reliance upon him as her director, or because he wanted to develop the idea of missions on a larger scale beyond the limits of the Gondy property, Vincent made up his mind to go.

He carried out his intention secretly, and went to M. de Bérulle, who, seeing that his mind was made up, did not attempt to prevent him.

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THE CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY

By the advice of M. de Bérulle, Vincent de Paul accepted new work as priest of Châtillon-les-Dombes, where he arrived on August 1, 1617. This was a little town in La Bresse, very poor, and having suffered much from the religious wars. The influence of Protestantism was very strong there, and the clergy could do little to counteract it, being ignorant and worldly. There were also several noble families in the neighbourhood of licentious and turbulent habits.

Perhaps nothing shows better the extraordinary power of Vincent, his rapidity of action, his genius for conceiving and carrying out schemes of Church work, than his five months' pastorate at Châtillon. Most newly appointed vicars would take that time to get settled in the parish; with Vincent it was sufficient in which to come, to organize and to carry through a revolution and to establish more than one permanent institution of enormous importance and to leave a flourishing work to his successor.

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The grass could not grow under his feet. He immediately restored and rearranged the church. In this favourite practice of his he reminds us of S. Francis of Assisi. It is a natural thing to do. Any priest who is full of faith and zeal, and has a message and means to deliver it, must first of all present religion to his flock as a living, visible, working reality. To preach the Catholic faith in a dirty, undignified place of worship is as if a surgeon were to practise in an hospital where there were soiled and rusty instruments, or a scanty supply of disinfectants and antiseptics, or a staff of incompetent nurses.

One can generally tell by looking at a church whether or not the Christian religion is being really taught and effectively practised in the place. One has grave suspicions if the church is locked up from Sunday to Sunday or if it is untidy or unclean. On the other hand, one can almost feel the living power of the active Spirit in those churches where the font and altars and pulpit and walls witness to the care and love of those who tend them. One has the evidence before one that religion is being carried on in the place as a working concern, that the church is being used for the purpose for which it was built, that it is not a museum of antiquities, but a home of love and progressive life.

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Vincent, then, insisted first on the renovation of the sanctuary in which he was to dispense the Word and Sacraments. This was the more important in a place such as Châtillon, where Protestantism had made so much havoc of the externals of religion. The reaction was now setting in. The excitement of persecution had abated. To be a Protestant did not mean, as it had meant, being ready to shed your blood for the sake of truth. Now it only meant having to try to worship God after the dull and depressing fashion of Calvinism.

Whether or not Vincent de Paul saw this and deliberately planned to use the attractive ceremonial of the Catholic Church as a means of winning back the heretics, one cannot say, but his method certainly succeeded. People flocked back again to the Church, and once more found the joy and warmth that always accompanies Christian worship when it is carried on in a reverent, faithful spirit. Of course, with a saint like Vincent de Paul it was never mere ritualism that moved him. To him the ritual of the Church was the normal expression of the Christian faith in action. As it was his deep concern for the souls of his people that made him urge upon them the making of a general confession, so it was because he believed so

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intensely in the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Lamb of God that he desired to represent that sacrifice adequately and reverently before the eyes of the people in a properly rendered Mass and at a properly appointed altar.

Vincent de Paul was what we should now-a-days in England call an Evangelical-Catholic. His all-absorbing aim was the salvation of men's souls. He desired above all things to point men to Christ, to get them to repent of sin and accept salvation at the hands of God through the one and only Redeemer, Jesus. But this truly evangelical desire did not make him careless of Church order or anxious to dispense with the old forms and immemorial practices of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, it was in those forms and practices that he found ready to hand the means of carrying into effect the Gospel which he preached. He was not troubled with the scares and nightmares of the modern Protestant. Priests and altars, confessionals and sacraments, were no barriers between the souls of men and the person of Christ: they were the very means by which all barriers were swept away: they were the windows that let in the light of life in the midst of the darkness of the world: they brought men into living contact with the Risen,

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Ascended, Interceding, Grace-giving, Loving Jesus Himself.

All that was needed was to revive them and make them active and effective. The priests were there: they had the authority to speak and to act in the name of the Lord: let them bring forth from their treasure things new and old. Some of them were ignorant, some were getting worldly and slothful. Touched by the example of Vincent de Paul, and persuaded by his earnest entreaties, many of them renounced their soft and easy-going lives and took to living in community. The Church once more became a living organisation in the place: priests and people each set about fulfilling their proper function in the Body of Christ. Sermons were preached, catechisms were started, eucharists were celebrated, communions were made, confessions were heard, the sick were visited, the poor were loved: the whole spiritual machine began to move and to do its work. And all this because of the self-denial, the charm, and earnestness of this humble priest.

A rich Protestant of the town, by name Béynier, in whose house Vincent lodged, was so impressed by him that he gave up a life of pleasure, renounced his heresy, and distributed the greater part of his property among the poor.

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Several members of his family followed his example; among these his young nephew, by name Jean Garron. He wrote to Vincent forty years afterwards to remind him of their former acquaintance.

A more remarkable conversion was that of the Comte de Rougemont. He was a notorious profligate, and one of the most famous duellists of the day. Entirely overcome by the simplicity and love of Vincent, he fell at his feet and with tears confessed his sins. He sold his castle and his property, and with the proceeds distributed alms to the poor or founded monasteries. Perhaps the greatest sacrifice he made was when he took his sword, and, after a farewell look at it, broke it, saying, "Now I am free."

Such conversions as these, and they are only a few out of many, were obviously very much more than mere formal abjurations of Protestantism. Nothing less than the old Pentecostal spirit of complete surrender to Christ can account for the practical effect produced in these men's lives.

It was the same with the women. Two noble ladies, Madame de la Chassaigne and Madame de Brie, visited the Saint. He immediately called upon them to repent. They too gave in and devoted themselves in the fresh enthusiasm of

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their love of Christ to His poor and sick. They went everywhere giving alms and visiting those who were suffering from the plague.

On one occasion, when Madame de la Chassaigne had recommended a certain family for relief, Vincent mounted his pulpit and made a strong appeal to the rich members of the congregation on their behalf. As was usual when M. Vincent asked, there was a ready response; in this case almost too ready. The sick and poor were loaded with gifts, and the want of organisation in giving relief was painfully apparent.

This set M. Vincent thinking, and he called his two lady friends together to consider the matter. "There is plenty of charity," he said, "but it is badly regulated. These poor sick folk, provided with too many provisions at once, will let part of it spoil or be lost, and will soon fall back again into their former state of want."

This interview resulted in the formation of the first *Confrérie de la Charité* (Confraternity of Charity), to give assistance both spiritual and corporal to the sick poor. The ladies who undertook it were bound by certain rules designed to make the charity more evenly and equally distributed in cases of illness, and a report was to be made to M. Vincent every

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month. These *Confréries* were afterwards common in France and Italy, and other parts.

The Rule of the Confraternity, approved by the Archbishop of Lyons, and promulgated at Châtillon on 8th December 1617, is of extreme interest.

It is the first of M. Vincent's great works, and shows his originality and wisdom in dealing with social problems. "Charity" with M. Vincent was no longer to be the exclusive work of clergy and religious persons: the laity were to do their share. Charity was not to be mere almsgiving, still less was it to be indiscriminate. A distinction was to be drawn between the deserving poor and the mendicants. Charity was to take the form of practical acts of mercy. It was, in fact, to be real Love, not money-scattering. The ladies were to get the meals ready for the sick, to make the beds, and even to superintend the burial of the dead.

In this Rule we see the germ of all Charity Organisation work, all scientific relief-giving, and, as we shall see, of the whole principle of Sisterhoods of Mercy, an entirely new idea at that time. So important and far-reaching was this Rule of the Confraternity that it has been thought well to give a rough translation of its principal parts :—

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"The Confraternity of Charity is instituted for the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, and to assist the sick poor of the places where it is established, both in body and in soul: in body, by administering to them their food and drink, and the necessary medicines during the time of their illnesses: in soul, by obtaining for them the administration of the Sacraments of Penance, the Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, and by taking care that those who are dying shall leave this world in a right condition, and that those who are cured shall make a resolution to live well for the future.

"The Confraternity shall be composed of a certain limited number of women, married and unmarried: the latter with the consent of their parents, the former with that of their husbands: and they shall elect three of their number among themselves, in the presence of the clergyman of the parish, by a majority of votes, every two years, on the day after Pentecost, who shall be their officers, the first of which shall be called Superior or Directress; the second, Treasurer or first Assistant; and the third, Wardrobe-keeper or second Assistant. These three officers shall have the entire direction of the said Confraternity: under the advice of the clergyman they shall elect also a gentleman of the parish, one pious and charitable, who shall be their Agent.

"The Superior shall take care that this present Rule is kept: that all the members of the Confraternity shall do their duty well: she shall receive the sick poor of the said parish who shall present themselves, and shall discharge them upon the advice of the other officers.

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"The Treasurer shall act as adviser to the Superior, shall keep the money of the Confraternity in a coffer with two different locks, of which the Superior shall hold one key and she the other, with the exception of one crown, which she may keep in hand for current expenses; and she shall render her account at the end of her two years to the newly-elected officers and to the other members of the Confraternity in the presence of the clergyman and such parishioners as may desire to come.

"The Wardrobe Keeper shall also advise the Superior; shall keep, wash, and mend the linen of the said Confraternity, and from it shall provide the sick poor with what they need, by order of the Superior, and shall take care to get it back and render the account of it at the end of her two years, as in the case of the Treasurer.

"The Agent shall have the management of all the collections which shall be made at the church or at the people's houses, and of the gifts which shall be given by individuals: he shall give receipts: he shall have the management of the business of the Confraternity and its income and property: he shall audit the Treasurer's accounts if necessary: he shall keep a register, into which he shall copy this present Rule and the record of the foundation, making a complete collection if possible. In the same register he shall keep a catalogue of the ladies who shall be received into the Confraternity, the date of their reception and of their death, the election of the officers, the balance-sheet of accounts, the names of the sick poor who shall have been assisted by the Confraternity, the day

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of their reception, of their death or of their cure, and, generally speaking, all that shall take place of any note or importance.

"The Sisters of the Confraternity shall in turns of a day each look after the sick poor who shall have been received by the Superior: they shall take to their houses their food and drink ready prepared: shall take it in turns to ask alms at the church and at the houses on Sundays and on the principal solemn feast days: they shall hand over their collections to the Treasurer, and shall inform the Agent of the amount collected. They shall have a Mass said at the altar of the Confraternity every first and third Sunday of the month, at which they shall assist, and on the same days they shall make their confessions and communicate, if convenient; and on the same days they shall also assist at the procession which will take place between Vespers and Compline, at which shall be sung the Litanies of our Lord or of the Virgin: they must do the same every year on the 14th of January, the Feast of the Name of Jesus, their patron.

"They shall love one another as persons whom our Lord has bound and united together by His own love: they shall visit and console one another in their afflictions and sicknesses: they shall assist in full force at the burial of those of their number who die, shall communicate with their intentions, shall cause a solemn Requiem to be sung for each of them: they shall do the same for the clergyman and for their Agent when they shall die: they shall be present in equally full force at the burial of the sick poor whom they shall have assisted, and shall cause

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a Low Mass to be said for the repose of their souls.

"There shall be given to each poor invalid for each meal as much bread as he can eat, five ounces of veal or mutton, soup, and half a bottle of wine (Paris measure). On fast days they shall be given, besides the bread, wine, and soup, a couple of eggs, or a little butter; and for those who cannot take solid meat some broth and new-laid eggs four times a day, and a nurse for those who are in danger and have no one to look after them." [1]

[1] Abelly I. ch. xxiii.

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FOR BODY AND SOUL

It was not to be expected that Madame de Gondy would allow herself to be deprived of the ministrations of M. Vincent altogether, or that he would be allowed by God to end his days in so small a sphere as that of Châtillon. From the moment that Madame had received the news of his departure, she had been striving to get him back again. He was still her confessor, and she saw him whenever she could. In October 1617, scarcely two months after his arrival at Châtillon, M. Dufresne was sent by Madame de Gondy to persuade M. Vincent to come back to Paris. It was represented to him that he ought to have a larger field for his labours. He consented to consult a priest at Lyons, and eventually submitted the matter to de Bérulle, who advised him to return.

"We lose all: we lose our father," said the people at Châtillon, when this wonderful five months' pastorate suddenly came to an end. M. Vincent made a characteristic departure, distributing his goods to the poor, including his

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old hat, and by Christmas Day found himself once more in the Hôtel de Gondy, this time for a stay of eight years (1618–1625).

The aim of the Gondy family was to give M. Vincent scope for his work. They saw clearly that he was a genius, and that he must not be confined within narrow limits. Though they had strong personal reasons for bringing him back to Paris, we must give them credit for having also a broader desire for the welfare of the Church at large. They were supported in their desire by men like de Bérulle and by the Archbishop of Paris (their own relation). They saw that though M. Vincent was a first-rate parish priest, he had in him the capacity for being something much more.

To have compelled M. Vincent to remain a parish priest would have been like making a first-rate general look after a garrison town in England while a difficult war was going on in South Africa. No doubt he would do the work splendidly, but it would be a waste of force. There were other clergy in the French Church able to look after little country parishes, but there was no one so able as M. Vincent to do the great works for the Church at large which God was calling him to do.

We have already noticed the beginnings of

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"Missions" and of the "Confraternity." M. Vincent now set to work to develop both these institutions in every direction. Several clergy were now beginning to follow his lead and were taking to preaching Missions. These Missions were all conducted on the same lines as the first. They consisted of appeals to the people to make general confessions and to find peace with God. Of course in the case of the Huguenots it meant primarily an appeal to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

Subsidiary to the Missions there was a great deal of work done for the bodies of the people. In almost every case the Mission resulted in the establishment of a "Confraternity." The object of the Confraternity was to make the result of the Mission permanent, an object which is too often forgotten in our modern Missions. We can easily see how useful the Confraternity would be in any given place following after a Mission. In the first place, it did good to the members of the Confraternity themselves. Many of them would be ladies of fashion, and others whose religion up to the time of the Mission would have been of a very formal kind. Now, having made their general confession, and being anxious to make a new start, the Confraternity gave them just what

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they wanted—an outlet for their zeal. There in Christ's poor and sick they would find Him Whom they had learnt to love afresh.

Then for the sick and the needy themselves, it meant bringing the lessons of the Mission to them in their homes. The Sisters of the Confraternity would tell them of the sermons and addresses, and urge them to send for the missioner, that they might make their confession as soon as possible. Later on, after the Mission was over, the Sisters would act as perpetual reminders to every one in the place of its message and its work. The converts would be continually meeting the members of the Confraternity, and would from time to time be led to renew the resolutions they had made; and when they in their turn were among the sick, they would be visited by Sisters who had from the beginning been connected with the Mission and had imbibed its spirit. This would lead to all kinds of spiritual intercourse, and the Mission would become a permanent source of inspiration and a bond of Christian living and Christian dying in every locality where one had been held.

The connection, too, between temporal and spiritual work was also of the greatest importance. With M. Vincent to minister to the body,

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or to the soul, was, as in the case of the Master Himself, one great work. The love of God in the Incarnation went out to all men and to the whole man, healing his body and his soul. So M. Vincent's desire for each was that he should be made whole: that the sick should be cured, the hungry fed, and that all should be at peace with God.

Here again we may take a leaf out of his book. What a pity that "Social Reformers" (so called) still imagine that higher wages, shorter hours, and better housing are all that the poor need! What a pity, too, that some Christian preachers think they have done all when they have worried and frightened some poor half-starved person into saying that he is "saved"! Surely the French priest's method is the right and sane and Christian one: to call on all men everywhere, rich and poor, to repent—that is, to change their minds and give themselves to God and His Holy Church: rich and poor to confess their sins and receive the blessed assurance of pardon through Christ; but also, rich and poor, to live as new men, new creatures, in love and brotherhood together: the rich living among the poor as those that serve, tending the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sharing their good things with each other, in-

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terested in one another's welfare, rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and weeping with them that weep. Yes, M. Vincent was right. He was a better Revivalist than the most eloquent of modern screamers, and a better Socialist than the most popular of modern demagogues.

In 1620 M. Vincent instituted a Confraternity of Charity for men, and M. de Gondy himself set a good example by becoming the first member. The rules for the male Confraternity were much the same as those of the original female society, but men were not allowed to nurse the sick. The chief object of the Confraternity was to help the poor to get work, and to teach them religion and piety. M. Vincent was always against mendicancy, and was the first to institute the principle of the Casual Ward or Shelter. Tramps were allowed a home for one night, some supper and a bed and two sous, but they were obliged to leave the next morning.

In the country the wants of the Confraternity were supplied by pastoral farming, sheep and oxen being kept for the purpose: in the towns workshops were started for youths, convalescents, and even able-bodied men, where they could get work and earn their living.

We must now notice another most remarkable work which M. Vincent did among the convicts.

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M. de Gondy was, as we have already noticed, General of the Galleys. The galleys were ships on which the convicts worked out their punishment. They formed part of the French fleet, with a general of its own.

M. Vincent naturally felt that M. de Gondy should use his high position for the amelioration of the lot of the poor convicts. The fact that such a good Christian as he had not moved in the matter before M. Vincent took it up need not surprise us when we think of the state of our own prisons and lunatic asylums in England in the last two centuries, a state of things which Christian people of all classes and denominations acquiesced in quite calmly, until reformers such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry called attention to it. It shows how the Christian conscience needs continual enlightenment. Things which are quite conscientiously tolerated in one age, become intolerable to all right-thinking people in the next. God the Holy Spirit works through a Vincent de Paul or a Romilly, or a Shaftesbury or a Kingsley, to lift up the Light of Truth in the darkness and to convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. The seeming callousness of Christians in some matters of social reform must not be considered in all cases wilfully wicked; it is merely that the

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darkness has not yet lifted: there is still a veil on their hearts: they "know not what they do." It has not been brought home to them that they are responsible: they do not realise that they are their brothers' keepers: like Moses, they must go out unto their brethren and look on their burdens, and from time to time God raises up some servant of His to point the way.

The treatment of the convicts was truly awful. They were mercilessly flogged, and sometimes thrown into the sea. While waiting in the cells before being sent to the galleys, they were fed on black bread and water, left to wallow in vermin, and covered with ulcers. The close air in their prisons was filled with blasphemies, and the cells were the scenes of most revolting obscenities.

M. Vincent made a thorough inspection both of the galleys themselves and of the prisons in Paris from which the convicts were drafted to the ships. The poor men must indeed have been astonished when the priest, like a good Samaritan, began to wash off the vermin and to give them proper food and to talk to them kindly. He at once appealed to M. de Gondy to use his great influence on behalf of these men, who, as he said, "belonged to him," being his special charge. M. de Gondy entered heartily

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into M. Vincent's schemes and recommended him to the king, Louis XIII., who made him chief chaplain of the galleys, and gave him the rights of an officer in the navy.

M. Vincent set on foot a collection, a proceeding which in his case was always crowned with success, and he bought a house in the Rue S. Honoré, which was immediately opened as a receiving house for the unfortunate men.[1] Having once begun this labour of love, M. Vincent kept on enlarging the scope of his operations, and soon undertook a general visitation of all the convict prisons in the kingdom. It is to this period that must be referred the well-known story,[2] the authenticity of which has been doubted, in which it is related that M. Vincent, seeing a young convict in tears bidding farewell to his wife, and taking pity on him, quickly took the poor man's place in the boat and allowed him to escape, while he himself was put in irons and commenced rowing in his stead. When the authorities discovered

[1] Antoine Portail, M. Vincent's first companion, was put in charge of them. He was afterwards Director of the Daughters of Charity. See p. 117.

[2] The story is told in different ways. Another version relates that Vincent prevailed on the officer in charge of the gang of convicts to allow him to change places with one, and that he worked for several weeks as a convict without its being discovered. This sounds even more incredible than the above.

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what had happened, they hustled M. Vincent out of the place as quickly as possible, and hushed the matter up. Many years afterwards a priest asked him whether the wounds on his legs came from the irons with which he had been fastened on that occasion, but M. Vincent only smiled and changed the conversation.

As usual, M. Vincent combined work for the soul with work for the body, and carried on a vigorous mission work among the convicts. But it was becoming clearer to him day by day, that the number and quality of priests who could do mission work was very limited indeed. He began, therefore, to turn his attention more closely than ever to the clergy and their training.

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"LA MISSION"

It was impossible for M. Vincent to go about the country taking Missions without becoming painfully aware of the ignorance and depravity of vast masses of the clergy.

A Protestant once said to him, "Sir, you have told me that the Roman Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, but I cannot believe it; because, on the one hand, one sees Catholics in the country abandoned to the care of vicious and ignorant persons, without being taught their duties, and most of them without knowing what the Christian religion is; and, on the other hand, one sees towns full of priests and monks who do nothing. In Paris, perhaps, one would find 10,000 of them, who yet leave these poor country folk in the frightful ignorance by which they are perishing: and you would persuade me that this is of the Holy Spirit! I will never believe it!"

It is true that, after watching the work of a Mission, he relented and said, "Now I see that the Holy Spirit does guide the Roman Church,

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for care is shown about the instruction and salvation of these poor villagers: I am ready to enter it when you will receive me." But his first words described the true condition of things.

The civil and religious wars had reduced the Church to a lamentable condition. The churches were in ruins, the altars had been thrown down, and the most sacred things had been profaned. There was no order or discipline in the Church, and no instruction of the young. The clergy were ignorant and idle. "Many of them," said Vincent, "are quite useless: they recite their Breviary, celebrate their Mass, and that very badly: some administer the Sacraments in a 'so-so' manner, and that is all; but the worst is they are in a state of vice and disorder."

A bishop wrote to M. Vincent describing the state of his diocese. He declared that there were no less than seven hundred clergy either drunken or immoral, yet saying their Mass daily: that there were others so ignorant that they did not know the formula of Absolution. Another wrote to him thus: "With the exception of one theological canon of my Church, I know no priest among the whole number in my diocese who could fulfil any one of his ecclesiastical duties properly."

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"The agitation of the religious controversy had left behind it," says M. Feillet, "nothing but fanaticism, ignorance, and coarseness." The clergy were no better than the congregations whom they tended: the pulpits were dumb: with few exceptions there were no great preachers. The state of convents and monasteries was worse than that of the secular priests. This is not surprising when one remembers that the control of them was given to men and women with absolutely no qualifications for the posts of abbat or abbess, sometimes to positively immoral people, and often to quite small children. Agnes Arnauld, for example, was made Abbess of St. Cyr at the age of five years, and the famous Mère Angélique was made coadjutress of Port Royal at the age of eight years and Abbess at seventeen. The convent of Maubisson, which the same Mère Angélique was called upon to reform, had sunk to an incredibly low state of degradation. It was the scene of drunken fêtes, cards, dice, and theatricals, and seems to have been the rendezvous of some of the fast society of Paris.[1]

Reform was bound to come, but it could never proceed from Protestantism in France. The

[1] Stephen, "Ecclesiastical Biographies," p. 442.

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Edict of Nantes (1598) had given the Protestants much liberty of conscience. Some hundreds of the houses of the aristocracy and certain cities were recognised as places where the Reformed doctrines could be preached without interference. These cities were petty republics, practically independent of the royal authority.[1] But the Calvinistic religion was utterly contrary to the national character of the French. It was cold and unimpressive, and the people yearned for warmth and vigour. The Huguenots were no longer eminently pious, nor were they free from the persecuting spirit when they had the chance of showing it. They had no great men to lead them. On the other hand, the Catholics were ready for the emergency. God was raising up amongst them some of the purest and holiest men and women that even the Church of France, so conspicuous for its saints, has ever produced. It was the age of S. Francis de Sales and S. Jane Chantal, of de Bérulle and the Oratorians, of the Abbé S. Cyran and Pascal and the Port Royalists, as well as of S. Vincent de Paul. The Port Royalists on account of their Jansenist opinions have been treated as heretics, but undoubtedly they took a very large share in reforming the Church at this time, both

[1] Gardiner's "Thirty Years' War," p. 70.

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in raising the spiritual tone of Church people and in doing works of charity.[1] Mère Angélique, as we have seen, was appointed coadjutress of the Port Royal monastery, and later on she became the Abbess. She was full of faith, meek, gentle, and pure, and speedily effected great reforms in the convent. She opened a religious house in Paris, and there came under the influence of Hauranne de Verger, the famous Abbé S. Cyran. He had been a friend of Jansenius,[2] and after his death proceeded to build up a society for the promulgation of his principles. Port Royal became the centre of a college of learned men. They took no vows, but retired to consecrate their lives in penitence and prayer and to instruct the young. It was an attempt at reform of the Church from within. Some of the greatest men of the day among the laity belonged to Port Royal. The most famous writer among them was Blaise Pascal.

Both the men and women of Port Royal were

[1] A vivid account of these most interesting persons is to be found in Sir James Stephen's "Ecclesiastical Biographies," vol. i. A shorter statement of their history can be read in Sismondi, vol. xxiv. ch. 26.

[2] Cornelius Jansen was a Dutchman, Bishop of Ypres, b. 1585, d. 1638. His great book, *Augustinus*, was published after his death. The famous "five propositions," which were gathered from the book by the Jesuits, and were alleged to be heretical on the subject of Grace and Freewill, were condemned by Innocent X., 1653.

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under the direction of S. Cyran, who carried on his operations from prison, whither he had been sent by Richelieu for his dangerous opinions. Vincent de Paul, as was inevitable, came frequently into contact with S. Cyran and with the Port Royalists generally. He naturally felt drawn towards them as sincere reformers and as persons given to charitable works, but he disliked their doctrines and opposed them uncompromisingly. Warning some one against a Jansenist book he wrote: "*Une telle source, qui, n'étant pas nette, donne sujet de craindre, qu'il y ait quelque danger à boire dans les ruisseaux qui en procèdent.*"[1]

But Vincent was never given to theological controversy. He allowed that the Jansenists, when they accused him of ignorance, were only speaking the truth. His method of reform was simpler than theirs, and certainly more lasting and effective. He saw the necessity of two things, mainly—the clergy must be properly trained, and the Church, both laity and priests, must represent Christ before men as the One who went about doing good: the distress so widespread in the towns and villages of France must be relieved in the name of Jesus.

Vincent would feel that it was not a time

[1] Lettres, vol. ii. No. 363.

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for disputing about grace, but a time for dispensing it: a time for showing the practical character of the Christian religion, not for discussing its doctrines. His idea was to get together a Society of Priests who should be free to consecrate all their time and energy to evangelistic work, especially in the country districts. They were to help the country clergy by teaching them, and by helping them to teach their flocks, by showing them good examples, and by a personal interest in their work.

Madame de Gondy had from the first foreseen the necessity of developing the "Mission" idea. She had put by large sums of money for that purpose, and now her husband added more to the fund. At the right moment the Collège des Bons-Enfants became vacant and was offered to M. Vincent. He never pushed himself forward, but in a wonderful way God seems to have always provided him with the place or the opportunity he wanted just at the right time.

On 6th March 1624 he was nominated principal, and on 17th April 1625 "La Mission" was formally started. M. et Madame de Gondy were the moving spirits of this new venture, and were aided in every way by their brother, the Archbishop of Paris.

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The original contract shows that they desired to form an Association of poor priests who would give up all idea of preferment and devote themselves to the country poor, primarily to those on the Gondy estates. Forty thousand livres were entrusted to Vincent, and he was appointed Superior. He was to continue to live in the Hôtel Gondy, and to minister to the spiritual needs of the family.[1]

The plan of Vincent for his priests was, broadly speaking, that they should spend nine months out of the year in mission work and three months in retreat. Here we see his great wisdom. He understood that it is quite impossible for a man to be perpetually preaching, giving out without taking in. While thus his priests would be devoting the greater part of their time to vigorous evangelistic work, freed from all parochial ties, they would nevertheless secure a considerable time for quiet thought and meditation, prayer and preparation, which would enable them to go out fortified and refreshed for their arduous duties. Vincent saw also that what the clergy needed was not mere head knowledge of doctrine or ability in eloquence or rhetoric, but rather a knowledge of men and things, an intelligent grasp of the

[1] The whole of this deed is given in Abelly, vol. i. book xvii.

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social situation as it presented itself in the towns and villages at that period. They were to be holy, Christ-like men, but eminently practical. They were to work hard like the Apostles; to combine the office of Martha with that of Mary; to be like the mother bird that shares her food with her young ones. He wished his priests to be real priests, representing God to man and representing also the perfect Manhood among men. They were to be in touch with the poor: they were to have what he called *rusticité* and *bonhomie*, two untranslatable words, but expressing by the first a certain kinship with country people as such, sympathy with their ways and needs, and by the latter real human fellow-feeling and good-humour. It was a reversion to the spirit of poverty as preached by S. Francis of Assisi, though without so complete a surrender of all property. It was perhaps a more practical idea of poverty than the early Franciscan one had been. It is true that Vincent himself possessed next to nothing of his own, and even when he received presents for himself would generally spend them on the work; but there was no vow of absolute beggary, as in the case of Francis. It was the spirit of poverty which Vincent wished to inculcate. The priests were to be "as poor and yet making

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many rich." Vincent himself had come from the ranks of the peasantry, and knew exactly what a poor person feels about the Church and the official representatives of the Church. He wanted his missioners to bring home to the people a new idea of the Church, or rather to revive the old idea. The Church is the Body of Christ. Christ Himself, in His simplicity, His poverty, His compassion, His love for the sick and suffering, the humble and the guileless, was to be manifested again among men, and the common people would hear Him gladly. So he would tell his priests to give plain discourses, easy to be understood; to use familiar expressions, though never to descend to vulgarity; to aim at rousing the consciences of their hearers by appeals to simple issues of right and wrong. They were to avoid the pompous methods of those eloquent preachers whom M. Vincent, with some humour, described as "not converting one single sinner in a whole Advent or Lent." They were to preach Jesus Christ and not themselves; above all things learning humility. "A person," he said, "who preaches to get applause, praise, esteem, to get himself spoken of, what is this person doing? This preacher! What is he doing? He is committing sacrilege! Yes, sacrilege! What! to

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12. **St. Vincent de Paul.**—ADDERLEY (J.) Monsieur Vincent, a Sketch of a Christian social reformer of the 17th Century; *photogravure frontispiece*, 1s 6d (pub 3s 6d), 1901.

make use of the Word of God and holy things in order to get honour and reputation; yes, it is sacrilege. Oh, mon Dieu! oh, mon Dieu! give grace to this poor little company that not one of its members may ever fall into this misfortune." The first members of the Congregation were to live remembering that they were the fathers to whose memory the future members would look back with veneration. "Oh, wretch that I am!" cried M. Vincent in an ecstasy of humility—"oh, wretch that I am, who says and does not! Pray God for me, gentlemen; pray God for me, my brothers, that God may convert me!"

The Mission, like everything else of Vincent's, began in a very small way. At first there were only himself and M. Portail, his faithful companion, who had been with him in much of his former work. They would go out on missions, leaving the house empty and giving the key to a neighbour. The numbers gradually increased, though even in thirteen years they only mustered thirty-three. The first eight who gave themselves to the work were, besides the two above mentioned, François du Coudray, Jean de la Salle, Jean Bécu, Antoine Lucas, Jean Brunet, and Jean d'Horgny.

By a Bull of Pope Urban VII., dated 1632,

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they were authorised as a regular "Congregation," and were accorded the title of "Prêtres de la Mission," the name by which they were already popularly known. M. Vincent was very careful that no others should be allowed to call themselves by this name.

But before this crowning act of authority had set the seal on the good work of the Gondy family, great changes had taken place for them. After many domestic troubles, including the death by accident of Henri, her second son and one of M. Vincent's boy pupils, the saintly life of Madame de Gondy came to an end. Truly she had seen of the travail of her soul and was satisfied. S. Vincent de Paul and his glorious work are her monument, and she can never be forgotten while his name is remembered. It must have been a sad duty for M. Vincent to have to perform when he broke the news to her husband at Marseilles. "The love of M. de Gondy for his wife was of the kind that does not twice plight its troth." He remained a widower, and two years afterwards, that is, in 1627, he carried out the desire he had long had in his mind to fulfil. He was ordained and retired to the Oratory, where he spent the rest of his life.

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S. LAZARE

M. LE BON, a Religious of the Order of the Canons Regular of S. Augustine, was Prior of the House of S. Lazare. He had had some difficulty with his Canons, and conceived the idea of handing over the Priory to Vincent de Paul and retiring himself. He accordingly made the proposal to him.

M. Vincent was astonished, and with his usual humility said at first, "Indeed, M., your proposal frightens me: and it appears so far above us that I should not dare to think of it. We are poor priests, who live simple lives, with no other wish beyond helping the country people. We are very much obliged to you, sir, for your goodwill and we very humbly thank you for it."

M. le Bon was so much touched by this that he resolved to persevere and to renew his request in six months. Again he was unsuccessful. At last, after repeated interviews on the subject, M. Vincent consented to take the advice of M. André Duval, doctor of the Sorbonne. The result was that on 7th January 1632 an agree-

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ment was entered into between the Prior and Religious of S. Lazare on the one part and the Priests of the Congregation on the other part.

When M. Vincent with his priests removed to the House of S. Lazare, he would not allow them to mix too much with the Augustinians, who seem to have been very lax in their observance. It is curious to find the Congregation, who did not claim to be "religious" in the technical sense, observing so strict a rule of silence and poverty as to be unable to live with these others who were supposed to be under the Augustinian rule. But M. Vincent's idea for his priests was quite clear, and he insisted on its practical realisation. When they were outside doing missionary work, they were to be apostles; when they were indoors resting and praying, they were to be as monks.

Here then the priests settled, and though in later years they had to give up the building, the site of which was eventually occupied by the prison of S. Lazare, yet the name of "Lazarists" has stuck to them to this day. The room, however, occupied by the Saint is still preserved, and has been turned into an oratory. Other relics can also be seen.[1]

[1] S. Lazare was pillaged and burned during the Revolution of 1789. The Lazarists left it in 1792. The Church of S. Vincent is

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S. Lazare became the centre of M. Vincent's work, which now rapidly developed in all directions. He saw that the problem of the state of the French priesthood would be solved more effectually by training up a new race of clergy than by attempting to convert the older class. One of the bishops, Augustin Potier of Beauvais, who was much concerned about the scandals in the Church, used frequently to converse with M. Vincent on the subject of reform, and it was he who suggested the idea of retreats for the ordination candidates.

The first experiment was made at the September ordination, with remarkable results. The good bishop began the retreat, and then left it in the hands of Vincent and two learned doctors from Paris. In the simplest manner Vincent addressed the candidates on the subject of the ten commandments. As a result, his audience all wished to make a general confession, including one of the learned doctors themselves, to the great edification of all present. The news of his success spread to Paris, and the Archbishop taking the matter up, ordered all his ordinands to make a ten days' retreat.

This was in 1631 and a year before the removal

still there, and visitors to Paris all know the *Gare du Nord*, which is on the same site.

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to S. Lazare, so the first of such retreats was held in the Collège des Bons-Enfants. Vincent undertook the conduct of these retreats four times a year at first, and afterwards six times. The expenses of the retreats were very heavy, and several of the grand ladies of Paris, even the Queen herself, contributed large sums towards the board of the candidates. When we remember that from seventy to ninety ordinands assembled at S. Lazare each time and stayed for eleven days, we can easily understand how heavy the burden must have been. But M. Vincent never complained, and, not content with his hard work in giving addresses and dealing with souls spiritually during the retreat, he would do all kinds of menial work for the ordinands, even cleaning their boots.

The exercises and rules of these retreats were very methodical and complete. The ordinands assembled ten days before ordination, and were received by the priests of the Mission, who were each told off to look after a certain number. There was a regular time allotted for meditation, for recreation, for spiritual conversation, and for sleep. The Bible and some book on the priesthood were read during meals, and practical instructions were given in the way to say Mass, the recitation of the Divine Office, &c. One of

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the main objects of the retreat was the preparation for the general confession, usually made by each candidate on the Thursday before the ordination.

The following is a much abridged list of the subjects of the addresses given during the ten days. There were two main courses: one on moral theology and practical matters necessary for priests to know; the other on the virtues proper to those who take holy orders.

The first or morning course was divided thus :—

I. Of Church censures in general.
II. Of particular censures: excommunication, suspension, &c.
III. Of penance and confessors.
IV. Of the necessary dispositions for penance.
V. Of the Divine law and the nature of sin.
VI. Of the duty towards God.
VII. Of the duty towards one's neighbour.
VIII. Of sacraments, especially of confirmation and communion.
IX. Of the eucharistic sacrifice, extreme unction, and holy marriage.
X. Of the Apostles' Creed: how to understand and teach it.

The evening course ran thus :—

I. Of mental prayer: its importance for priests: the method of it.
II. Of the vocation to the priesthood.

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III. Of the ecclesiastical spirit: how to acquire and to perfect it.
IV. Of the sacrament of orders in general.
V. Of the clerical tonsure: what it means and involves.
VI. Of the minor orders.
VII. Of the sub-diaconate: the virtues proper to this order, and especially chastity.
VIII. Of the diaconate: its virtues, especially lov of the neighbour.
IX. Of the priesthood: of the special knowledge necessary for priests.
X. Of the ecclesiastical state: the necessity of holy living: helps towards it.

The desire of M. Vincent was to give the young ordinands a taste of the advantage of a regulated and orderly life during these ten days, at the same time not discouraging them by making it too hard. He insisted on great simplicity in the addresses, believing that it was of the highest importance in impressing the ordinands. On one occasion, when a priest had given an address not quite in the customary spirit of "S. Lazare," he went down on his knees to him, imploring him to adopt a simpler and more devotional style. He wished the retreat to be a perfect example of priestly living. He insisted on the greatest care being exerted by all concerned in every detail; not only at the lectures, but at the Masses, the offices, and meals.

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It is impossible to exaggerate the good which M. Vincent must have done by these retreats, and especially by his own personal work amongst the ordinands. He gave them an entirely new idea of the priesthood, and opened their eyes to the seriousness of what they were undertaking. One can imagine how uncomfortable a man would feel at the retreat who had unworthily presented himself for ordination with the prospect of a lucrative benefice or for family reasons, a state of the case only too common at that time.

The Congregation were carefully trained by M. Vincent for this holy work of preparing ordination candidates. To occupy oneself in making good priests was, said M. Vincent, to do the work of Jesus Christ, who, in His mortal life, occupied Himself in the task of making twelve good priests, the Apostles, willing for this purpose to live with them for many years, to teach them and to shape them for this sacred ministry.

"Oh, you who are immediately concerned in this work: you who should possess the spirit of priesthood and with it inspire those who have it not: you to whom God has entrusted these souls, to dispose them to receive this holy and sanctifying spirit, look for nothing

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but the glory of God: have simplicity of heart towards Him, and respect towards these gentlemen."

So, too, they must pay attention to the proper rendering of the ceremonial: they must show a good example in this: they must sing steadily (*posément*): they must say the psalms devoutly. Ceremonial is but a shadow, but it is the shadow of the greatest of great things. His idea was conversion by edification rather than by learning: many of the candidates for ordination, as he used to remind his priests, were likely to be more learned than they.

"Scarcely anything that one can tell them here is new to them: they have already read it or heard it: they say themselves that it is not that which touches them, but rather the virtues which they see practised here." "God," he said, "would use them, poor in knowledge, poor in spirit, poor in estate, to do great works, just as He uses water and the word in Sacraments to confer great graces." He was perpetually reminding them how much depended on having good leaders in the Church, good bishops, good priests. "As the success of an army in war depends on the officers, so," he would say, "the success of the Church would depend on her ministers. As are the shep-

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herds, so are the people: we have been formed by God to work at a masterpiece: the making of good priests is a masterpiece: there is nothing greater or more important."

There is abundance of evidence that these retreats had the most direct and beneficent results both in France and in Italy, where the fashion of holding them was soon adopted. They were really of the nature of Missions to ordinands. We read of some of these young men being practically converted during the retreat, and in floods of tears making up their minds to make a general confession. The faithful, too, looking on at them in church, are so much edified at their devout behaviour learnt in retreat, that they too cannot refrain from weeping.

It is interesting to note some of the famous names of those who passed through this course of training inaugurated by M. Vincent. There was M. Olier, the founder of S. Sulpice, Rancé, the reformer of La Trappe, and the great Bossuet himself.

"From our youth we were acquainted with the venerable priest Vincent de Paul," said the latter, "and it was from his pious discourses that we first derived the true principles of Christian piety and ecclesiastical discipline, a

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memory which to this day has for us a marvellous charm." "We were permitted to enjoy him in the Lord and to study his virtues face to face, and especially that genuine and apostolic love of his, his seriousness, and his prudence joined to great simplicity of heart."[1]

. . . . . .

The next extension of M. Vincent's work was in the direction of providing for those priests who, having started well by attendance at the ordination retreat, wished to maintain the spirit they had acquired and to help one another to mutual edification and perseverance. It was suggested to him that the priests should meet from time to time and confer with one another on these subjects. These priests met and drew up rules for what were afterwards called the "Tuesday meetings," Tuesday being the day selected for the new weekly *Conférences Ecclésiastiques*. It was necessary to have an introduction from three members before belonging to the "Conference": all members were to be regular in their attendance. The subject to be discussed was announced some time beforehand, in order that all might study it. M. Vincent would address them in a simple, humble man-

[1] De Broglie, p. 100. See the whole of Bossuet's Letter to Pope Clement, 1702, in Collet, vol. iv., Appendix.

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ner, taking as his text some words of our Lord in the Gospels. He treated of the most common and ordinary matters in a quite extraordinary manner, and in words which touched and struck his hearers, and always produced excellent effects. The other priests followed his example, no one attempting any great speech or to appear clever but each one seeking the glory of God and the spiritual benefit of himself and the others.

The members of the "Tuesday meetings" became a little Company with a Rule of Life given them by M. Vincent. They were to help one another in every way, comforting one another in sickness and sorrow, and assisting at the funeral of any who died. There was a rule for the occupation of each day, including regulations as to time to rise, half-an-hour's meditation, celebration of Mass, reading the New Testament kneeling and bareheaded and with appropriate devotion, study, short reflection before dinner, reading a spiritual book after dinner, &c.

It was from this little Company as well as from his own particular Congregation that Vincent chose priests to take retreats in various dioceses, and gradually permeated the whole Church with new ideas and deeper concern

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about spiritual matters, to the great glory of God and enrichment of His Church. It was in this way, too, that M. Vincent obtained so intimate a knowledge of the *personnel* of the French priesthood at that time which made him invaluable as an adviser in making appointments in the Church.

The priests of the Company also conducted Missions on their own account under Vincent's direction. Amongst others, we have the story of a very remarkable revival which took place in the Faubourg S. Germain in 1642. This was a very low quarter, "the sink, not only of Paris, but of all France."[1] A pious lady asked M. Vincent to devise some means of attacking this stronghold of vice, and he put the matter before the priests of the Company. At first several of them objected to the proposal. Then M. Vincent implored them to go, telling them that it was the will of God that they should. Then thinking that perhaps he had gone too far, he knelt before them and asked pardon for his presumption. This touched them so much that they consented and submitted to his direction in the matter. He advised them to get to work in the simplest manner possible, be-

[1] M. Olier is said to have found an altar to Beelzebub in his parish of S. Sulpice ("Vie de M. Olier," Part ii. Bk. 2, n. p. 448).

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lieving that the spirit of the world would be most successfully met by the spirit of Christ. They should preach and speak as He would do, simply and familiarly, with humility and love. The result was truly marvellous. "Old sinners, hardened usurers, lost women, prodigals who had spent all their living in wrong-doing, men without faith and without God, cast themselves at their feet, their eyes full of tears and their hearts touched to the quick with remorse for their sins."

It is most remarkable how each of M. Vincent's works led on to something else: there was a continual development: there was incessant progress.

Now, as was only to be expected, there came the demand to extend the advantages of retreats to all. Laymen, both devout persons who needed spiritual refreshment and sinners who sought to make or to renew their penitence, those who were considering their vocation to the religious state or to holy orders, all kinds of persons sought refuge from time to time at S. Lazare. No less than 800 persons in a year and some 20,000 in twenty-five years are said to have shared these spiritual benefits.

M. Vincent seems to have kept a sort of open

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house for all kinds of people. In the same refectory with the priests of the Mission were to be seen "a large number of persons from outside, from town and country, rich and poor, young and old, students and doctors, priests, rectors, dignified ecclesiastics, nobles, counts, marquises, &c., attorneys, advocates, members of public bodies, chairmen, magistrates, and other officers of justice, tradespeople, artisans, soldiers, even pages and footmen : all such were taken in, lodged and fed in this great Hospital of Charity, to make their retreat there and to find there the cure for their spiritual sickness and the necessary help to get back into the way of Salvation."[1]

M. Vincent, with his usual good-humour, said that S. Lazare was like Noah's Ark, where all kinds of animals, great and small, were taken in and lodged. When M. Vincent was told that the expenses were becoming too great, and that the house was too much taken up with this business, he replied : "If we had thirty years to live, and by receiving those who come to make their retreat we could only subsist for fifteen years, it would not be right for that to leave off receiving them. True, the expense is great, but the money could not be better spent." To those

[1] Abelly, p. 641.

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who managed the reception of the retreatants he said: "Give them our room when all the others are full."

Once he himself undertook the reception of those who applied for admission, thinking he would be able to discriminate better and so lessen the number of admissions. So far from this, he was so easy-going that he took in more than ever, not having it in his heart to refuse anybody. When it was pointed out to him that out of the crowds that came many did not get as much good out of the retreats as they might, he replied, "It is no small matter if only a few profit." So again, when it was hinted to him that some came to get food for their bodies rather than their souls, he answered: "Well, in any case it is an alms which is pleasing to God; and if you make it difficult for them to be received, you will end by repulsing some whom our Lord wishes to convert by means of the retreat, and the excess of care which you bring into examining their motive will cause some to lose the desire they had conceived of giving themselves to God."

"Take care, sirs," he said to his brothers, "take care that God does not take away from us this harvest which He offers us; for He transfers

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His grace to others when it is not used as it ought to be."

"This house, sirs, was formerly used as a retreat for lepers: they were received here and not one was cured: now it is used to receive sinners, who are sick men covered with spiritual leprosy, but who are cured by the grace of God: rather, let us say, they are dead men brought to life. What joy to think that the house of S. Lazare is a house of resurrection! Lazarus after he had been three days in the tomb came out alive, and our Lord who raised him up still gives the same grace to many who, after staying here some days as in the grave of Lazarus, come out of it with a new life."

Each case was a matter of the supremest interest to M. Vincent, and he would earnestly recommend every one of the retreatants severally to the prayers of his brethren. At one time it is a soldier who wants to test his vocation to religion: at another it is a soldier who wants to remain at his profession, but who seeks the comfort of a retreat: at another it is a Protestant controversialist who has returned to Catholicism: at another it is a priest in spiritual distress. Each is to have love and tenderness and the greatest care bestowed on him—his body and his soul.

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The time-table of the retreat was given to the retreatant immediately on his arrival: care was to be taken to provide him with books, paper, candles, sheets, and even a nightcap.

We have now seen how S. Vincent met the needs of many classes of clergy: the ordinands on the eve of ordination, the priests in the first beginnings of their ministry, the clergy in the thick of parish work. There only remained one other class whom it was necessary to deal with in a reformation of the clergy—namely, the boys and young men preparing for the ministry.

This class, of course, S. Vincent had always had his eye on from the very beginning, and he had long intended to form a seminary at the Collège des Bons-Enfants. But he felt that the process of educating children for the priesthood was not altogether satisfactory, some not having any vocation, and being unable to proceed to ordination after all. He accordingly resolved to form another kind of seminary for older boys, who had settled vocations for the ministry and who were on the point of being ordained. In these seminaries they would be taught the most necessary theological subjects, and would study practical matters, such as how to preach, to catechise, to celebrate Mass, to sing plain-chant, &c. Cardinal Richelieu helped

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him with advice and money, and the seminary was opened at the Bons-Enfants in February 1642.

The work had been going on some years before this in a small way, and M. Vincent had been learning by experience what the faults of the Seminary system were. He found it necessary to separate the little boys who were just commencing their education from the youths just about to take Orders. He accordingly took another house near S. Lazare which he called the "Seminary of S. Charles," in which he placed the younger ones and retained the Bons-Enfants for what we should now call a Theological College.

Just at the same time, and almost on the same day, M. Olier was starting what was destined to become the most famous seminary in France at S. Sulpice. Even in this work we may claim a share for S. Vincent, for it was he who had educated M. Olier.

"M. Vincent is our father," said the founder of S. Sulpice. As an indication of the rapid growth of the Seminary system under the Lazarists, we may note that by the time of the French Revolution they were directing fifty-three great seminaries and nine little ones, that is to say, one-third of all the seminaries of France.

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A perpetual Mission was carried on at the seminaries. Those who were to be priests, and others who had already received benefices, came to them and allowed themselves to be preached to with extraordinary results. Old quarrels were made up: ill-gotten gains were restored: livings were resigned by incompetent clergy who gladly betook themselves to lower offices in the Church, such as those of porter or thurifer: others went back to their parishes and began catechising for the first time: associations of clergy were formed for devotional and studying purposes: preachers resolved to adopt a simpler method of addressing country people: and on every side resolutions were made for the better and more zealous performance of clerical duties.[1]

To sum up, we may say that in all these works what M. Vincent aimed at was the real conversion of the clergy. The French expression, *Formation du Clergé*, translated "Training of the Clergy," might in this case be rendered more literally *Formation*. M. Vincent really desired to "form," to shape, to model a priest. He had before his eyes the Lord and His Apostles: the ideal priesthood was in them.

The heresy and the schism and the ignorance and the immorality of the country districts of

[1] Abelly, II. ch. v.

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France could only be faced by the introduction of a new strain of ministry, and that new strain really from the old stock. Let the grace of God work: let these men, the ordinands, the newly ordained, the priests of some years' standing, let them be faithful, converted men, corresponding with the Spirit, and Pentecost would be repeated. "God would show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath."

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THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

MADAME DE GONDY, the inspirer of the Mission, had passed away. At almost the same time Louise de Marillac, Mademoiselle le Gras, destined to be the leading spirit under M. Vincent of his other great work, was left a widow. She was twenty-four years old. For a year she had been under the direction of Vincent de Paul, to whom she had been confided by Monsignor Camus, the friend of S. Francis de Sales. She lived in the parish of Saint-Sauveur, in which was situated the Hôtel de Gondy, the residence of S. Vincent. She was so entirely under his influence that his absence for any length of time was a cause of desolation to her. With any one less practical or less humble than Vincent, this might have done harm to both parties. As it was, he guided her with the utmost good sense, and she became, under his direction, one of the strongest and holiest characters among women. After her husband's death she went to live in a poor and quiet part of Paris, to be near S. Vincent. She very soon made a solemn devotion of herself to

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our Lord, like the widows mentioned in Holy Scripture. The words of her self-consecration, corrected by S. Vincent, are very beautiful, as follows :—

"I, the undersigned, in the presence of the Eternal God, considering that on the day of my Holy Baptism I was vowed and dedicated to my God to be His daughter, and that nevertheless I have again and again sinned against His most holy will: considering also the unbounded mercy, love, and gentleness with which this most good God has always preserved me in the desire to serve Him, notwithstanding an almost perpetual resistance of which I have been most seriously guilty, and although I have all my life neglected and despised the graces which His kindness has bestowed upon me, which in my case have been very great, unworthy and sorry creature that I am: finally, reflecting on myself, I hate with all my heart the iniquities of all my past life, which prove me guilty of treason against God and of the death of Jesus Christ, and would merit greater damnation than that of Lucifer himself. But, trusting in the infinite mercy of my God, I ask of Him with all my heart pardon and entire absolution, both of the sins of which I accuse myself and of those which I cannot remember, and particularly of the misuse which I have made of the Sacraments, which could only have come from contempt of His kindness, of which I repent again with all my heart, casting myself on the merits of the death of the Saviour of my soul as the sole foundation of my hope, in virtue of which I renew the profession made by me to my God at my baptism, and resolve irrevocably to love Him and serve Him more faithfully,

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giving myself entirely to Him. And for this purpose I also renew my vow of widowhood, and my resolution to practise the sacred virtues of humility, obedience, poverty, patience, and charity, to honour these same virtues in Jesus Christ, with which He has so often inspired me in His love; declaring also that I will never again offend God with any part of my being, and that I will abandon myself utterly to the purpose of His Holy Providence for the fulfilment of His Holy Will in me, to which I dedicate and sacrifice myself for ever, choosing it as my supreme consolation."

Then, after confirming it in the presence of God, the Blessed Virgin, her guardian angel, and the saints, she concludes thus:—

"O my God! may it please Thee to confirm these sacred resolutions and consecrations, and to accept them as the odour of a sweet smell; and as it has pleased Thee to inspire me to make them, give me the grace to perfect them, O my God! Thou art my God and my all. Thus I acknowledge and adore Thee, true and only God in Three Persons, now and for ever.—*Vive votre amour et celui de Jésus crucifié!*

"LOUISE DE MARILLAC."

Her life was very strict. She would rise at half-past five and spend an hour or more in prayer and meditation. She would hear Mass daily, and fill up every hour of the day with some occupation, reading, praying, working for the Church or the poor, with a cheerful heart, paying visits, saying offices, and making self-

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examination. "I will try," she wrote, "to put myself every hour at least four times in remembrance of the presence of God, exciting as much as I can the desire to love Him."

She had a great wish to devote herself to some special work for God, but she tried to wait patiently to be shown the way, like her director. "In my idleness," she said, "days seem sometimes like months. I want, however, to wait calmly God's time, and to recognise that it is my unworthiness which makes it slow."

At last her opportunity came. It will be remembered how the "Confraternities of Charity," or, as we may call them for short, the "Charities" had spread all over the provinces, especially on the estates of the Gondy family. M. Vincent had now established one of them in Paris, in the parish of Saint-Sauveur. Mademoiselle le Gras asked his permission to organise it in the quarter where she lived, and others soon sprang up in different parts of Paris.

Then a most important development came about, which was really the beginning of the famous Sisterhood, the "Daughters of Charity." The original members of the Charities in the country were used to the work they had to do and found no difficulty in it: it was different in Paris. Several ladies of high rank enrolled

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themselves, who, although they did the spiritual work most excellently, and even much of the temporal work, were not able to do such things as cooking dinners for the poor and other menial occupations very successfully. It became necessary to give them assistance. This M. Vincent found among the young village maidens whom he frequently came across in his Missions, girls "who had neither the desire to marry nor the means of becoming 'Religious,' but who wanted to devote themselves to good work."

The first who offered herself was a most remarkable girl, Marguerite Naseau. She was a poor shepherdess who had from her earliest years had a great desire to be a teacher. She taught herself to read while minding the cows, asking the passers-by to help her with the difficult words; then she taught her companions, and some of them took to wandering about from village to village, teaching children and begging their bread. Sometimes they were reduced to starving-point, but God always provided for them. One day she met S. Vincent, who perceiving what a treasure he had found, immediately sent her to Paris, where she was put under the supervision of Mademoiselle le Gras, and became practically the first

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Fille de la Charité, assisting the Confraternities with other girls who soon came forward to join. Now there are said to be twenty thousand "Daughters," or, as we call them, "Sisters." But the first was this poor farm-girl. A few years later she died, a victim to the plague.

During the next two years (1629–1631) Mademoiselle le Gras was chiefly occupied in visiting the country Charities. They needed a good deal of encouragement after the death of Madame de Gondy, who had been their mainstay, and there were many points in which they wanted improvement and consolidation. Sometimes the country clergy resented the interference of Mademoiselle le Gras, but she was told by M. Vincent to bear it patiently, and rejoice that, like our Lord, she was persecuted. She was saturated with the spirit of poverty and it was her great desire to live after the style of the poor people whom she visited. This made her ill and called forth a loving reprimand from M. Vincent. "Have a care," he said, "to keep your health for the love of our Lord and His poor members, and take care not to overdo yourself; it is a trick of the devil by which he deceives good souls, to entice them to do more than they can, so that they may be unable to do anything at all. The

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Spirit of God, on the contrary, entices one gently to do good as reasonably as one can, so that one may do it perseveringly and for a long time."

Meantime the number of young girls who were coming to Mademoiselle le Gras for training, and who were helping the Charities, was continually increasing, and M. Vincent saw that some kind of "novitiate" [1] was necessary. Three or four of the girls were taken into her house by Mademoiselle le Gras on 29th November 1633, which may be looked upon as the date of the foundation of the Filles de Charité. Besides these young girls some widows were received. There was no "Rule" at present, and the accommodation was somewhat cramped. "The Cross is our cloister," said Mademoiselle; and certainly she spared herself no inconvenience or trouble, sometimes sharing her room, and even her bed, with the girls. *Confiance, simplicité, cordialité* was the motto of her work.

S. Vincent was ill at the time, but as soon as he had recovered, he called a meeting of the "Daughters" and delivered the first of his addresses to them. No less than ninety-four

[1] He never called it "novitiate," because the Order was not a Religious Community.

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such addresses are printed which S. Vincent gave to his Daughters at different times. There is a charming simplicity about all S. Vincent's speeches and sermons. The following is the account of the first, which he delivered on 31st July 1634 :—

"Providence has brought you together here, my daughters, in order that you may honour, as it seems to me, the human life of Jesus Christ upon earth." Then he showed them how our Lord was present among them in accordance with His promise to those who should assemble in His name, and above all, with those who were united to do His service. But as yet," he continued, "you have had no Rule. But while waiting until it shall please God to have this done, let us see how you are to pass the twenty-four hours of the days, which pass into weeks and months, and then into the years which will lead you to the joyful eternity."

"Firstly, you will rise at four o'clock, so far as your works of mercy will allow; you will retire to rest at nine o'clock, in order to preserve strength for the service of the poor." Then there was to be the dedication to God from the early morning of their thoughts, words, and affections; a dedication which would give

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strength and merit to every action. "That is why Satan does his utmost to turn us from thinking of God directly we awake."

"Secondly, my daughters, there is prayer. That is the very central act of your life of devotion. God gives us very many noble thoughts: preserve them with care, in order to put them into practice. That is the way to please Him. Do not believe that poor unlearned girls, such as you consider yourselves, ought not to pray. God is good, and one of the proofs of His goodness to you is that He has called you to the performance of works of mercy. How could you then imagine that He will refuse you the grace for which you need to pray? Oh, my daughters, let such a thought never enter your mind!"

"Thirdly, take care to speak afterwards about your prayers. Tell to one another in a simple manner the thoughts that God gives to you."

"Fourthly, go daily to the Holy Eucharist. But go with great reverence, for when you are there, what, think you, do you do? The very same act as the priest; for in reality it is not he alone who offers the Holy Sacrifice, but he together with those who are present."[1]

[1] Here S. Vincent shows himself a sacerdotalist in the right sense of the word.

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"Fifthly, when your prayers are over, and you have left Mass in order to cook for the poor, you must know, my daughters, that you suffer no loss, for you serve God no less in attending upon the poor. . . . Take pains, then, to give them all the attention that is necessary, particularly seeing to their spiritual needs. Bear with their moods: never be angry with them, and do not address harsh words to them: it is hard enough for them to support their afflictions. Rather think of yourselves as their visible guardian angel, their father and mother: deny them only that which is harmful for them, for it would be cruel to grant a request in such cases: sorrow with them; God has intended you for their consolation.

"Always take care to have an occupation for the spare time you may have after attending to the sick. Take pains to learn to read, in order to be fit to teach children in the places to which you will be sent. Do you know what is the will of God with regard to you? Be ready then to go wherever you may be directed by those to whom you owe holy obedience . . . not as the children of Zebedee, who asked to be sent to places that they chose, which request for their own good God did not grant."

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Then pointing out those who were to hold this office during the month, he said, "Look upon them, my daughters, as upon the Blessed Virgin herself. . . . Let me here mention to you a circumstance which concerns myself. When God brought me into contact with Madame de Gondy, at that time wife of the General of the Galleys, I made up my mind to regard her and to obey her as I would the Virgin, and God knows how much good this practice did me. Honour the Ladies of Charity, and in their presence pay great respect to them. Honour also those who are sick, and look upon them as your masters."[1]

After this the Daughters knelt for their father's blessing.

It has been thought that the idea of the Sisterhood was suggested to S. Vincent by S. Jeanne de Chantal[2] and the Order of the Visitation, but this is almost certainly not the case. The Sisters of the Visitation practised the contemplative life, and though some of them occasionally visited the

[1] De Richemont, p. 108.

[2] The intimate friendship of Madame de Chantal and M. Vincent dated from 1619, when S. François de Sales entrusted the direction of his Sisters of the "Visitation" in their branch house in Paris to our Saint. Madame de Chantal frequently visited Paris. Her last stay there was in 1641, at the end of which year she died at Moulins.

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poor and sick, it was not their main work at all. The evolution of the *Filles de la Charité* from the *Confréries de la Charité* seems perfectly clear and reasonable.

We have now yet another work of pressing importance to describe, and again the initiatory idea is due to a woman. Just as Madame de la Chassaigne was connected with the institution of the "Charity," Madame de Gondy with the Mission, Mademoiselle le Gras with the *Filles*, so now it is Madame Goussault, widow in 1631 of President Goussault, another most devout lady, full of prayer and holy joy, who is the prime mover of the "Ladies of Charity."

She made a simple proposal to S. Vincent to extend the operation of the Charities to the sufferers in the Hôtel Dieu, the great hospital of Paris, and to organise a new company of ladies for this purpose. Private meetings were called and the work was instituted. Ten ladies began this work; in a very short time 120 had joined them.

They were mostly wives or widows of men high in the State, and many of them persons to whose special purity and holiness of heart S. Francis de Sales, who knew them intimately, has borne his witness.

They were all agreed in their desire to visit

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the sick in the hospital; it only remained to regulate their desire and to devise a plan. S. Vincent de Paul's instructions to them are, as usual, models of courtesy and good sense. The Hôtel Dieu was at that time nominally managed by some Augustinian nuns. S. Vincent tells his ladies they are to be very careful not to offend these nuns. They had done a great deal of good in the hospital, and they must be respected. Then the poor sick people are to be instructed and comforted, but it is to be done gently. The ladies are not to make them sad by a display of luxury and riches, but are to be humble and simple and modest. They are not to play the parts of learned people, and, "so as not to appear to preach," they are to have always at hand a little book containing the principal Christian truths, and to make use of expressions like this: "I have been taught . . . I have been advised in such-and-such a way. . . . This is how I have been taught to make my confession and to say my prayers," &c., &c.

But they are not to forget that the way into a man's heart is often through bodily help; and in this matter Madame Goussault made an excellent suggestion, that the sick people who needed some little extra comforts beyond the regulation "dinner" and "supper" should be

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supplied with jellies and the like. A room was set apart for the Daughters of Charity, in which they manufactured these delicacies, and thus they were brought in to help the "Ladies" in their excellent work. A most astonishing success it seems to have been. Every afternoon these good women came, some of them princesses and duchesses, to the Hôtel Dieu. After a little visit to the Holy Sacrament, they separated into parties of four and walked through the wards. Wearing white aprons and accompanied by the "Daughters," they went from bed to bed, distributing the "comforts." Often they would sit for hours together pleading with the patients to repent and make their confessions, or to recant their heresies.

In the first year no less than 760 Lutherans, Calvinists, and Turks were converted to Catholicism. We are not told how many Catholics were converted to Christ, but we hope there were many. Beautiful as the work of these holy women was, and obviously blessed by God, and much as one wishes that the ladies of modern London would imitate their example, one does not feel that the story of the *Dames de la Charité* is by any means the most wonderful part of the history of S. Vincent de Paul. It is the experience of all that have had to do

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with hospitals that "conversions" are more easily made under the circumstances of sickness and convalescence than under any other. One adds to this the novelty of the experience to which these poor sick folk were treated: the bright, fresh faces of the country girls bringing them delicious sweetmeats, instead of the tired, disappointed-looking nuns, dealing out a round of dull dinners by the weight: the exquisite grace and tender sympathy of these ladies, most of whom had known sorrow and suffering themselves, fond mothers and chastened widows, sitting by their bedsides and showing them a love the existence of which as a reality they had almost forgotten: possibly, too, the pleasant sensation, a sensation not by any means confined to the snobs of England, of being visited by one of noble and even royal blood: all the sweetness and culture and refinement, "the product of generations of sheltered homes, of special training, of exceptional advantages": all that goes to make up the "splendour and incalculable efficacy of the lives and characters" of the gentry.[1]

So, too, there is the fact that these loving

[1] The only movement in England at all parallel to this has been that of the Primrose League in our own day, in the interests of Imperial Toryism.

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women brought a message of brightness for gloom, the brilliant truths of the Catholic religion for the drab mysteries of Calvinism. Many who had lapsed would be reminded of the days of their childhood: the tears would come into their eyes at the thoughts of their first communion: they would begin to pine for the joy of the Sacraments and the thrilling grandeur and speaking reality of the Mass: they would feel the practical usefulness of Confession: they would see that it was the obvious thing for them to do, if they wanted to make their peace with God, whether to die happy or to live well. When one fancies all this, one is not surprised at the success of the "Dames"; one admires them, but one does not wonder much.

Moreover, like the disagreeable man in the opera, one would like to know how many of these conversions held good when the sick people came out. Still, as these ladies would have been the first to allow, this work was of the highest importance as an education for themselves. Mademoiselle le Gras, who was naturally brought much into contact with them, spoke in the highest terms of their devotion. They found Christ in His suffering members. They are certainly a pleasing contrast to the frivolous ladies of the "Fronde," of whom we

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shall speak in another chapter.[1] God must have specially raised up these and other holy women of that period to act as the lights of the world in the midst of that crooked and perverse generation.

But to return to the story of the Daughters of Charity. To obtain more room, and also to be near S. Lazare, where S. Vincent was now permanently established, it became necessary to take another house, and in May 1636 Mademoiselle le Gras took up her residence with the Daughters at "La Chapelle," a place situated on the S. Denis road not far from S. Lazare; going to the new residence, as she wrote, "with the object of there honouring Divine Providence who leads me there, and in the desire to do there all that He will permit me to do."

But it was some time before any definite Rule was given to them as a Congregation. It was always S. Vincent's plan to wait and let things grow naturally. The "Daughters," or, as it seems better to call them, the Sisters, were continually asking to have a Rule and to be allowed to take vows. S. Vincent himself one day whetted their appetite by describing the beautiful form of vow which he had heard taken by the *Frères Hospitaliers:* "I, Brother N., make a vow

[1] See p. 135.

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and promise to God to observe all my life poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to serve *our lords the poor*."

"Oh, my daughters," he added with emotion, "if you only knew how pleasing it is to Jesus Christ for us thus to honour the poor, His dear members." The Sisters were more than ever anxious to take vows. The Saint so far relented as to let them take "simple vows," as distinct from "solemn vows." This would not make them "Religious," involving grylls and cloisters "incompatible with their vocation," but the obligation would be none the less serious. As a result of this, four of the Sisters took simple vows for a year from the 25th of March 1642. The Mother renewed her promises with them, and though they technically bound themselves for a limited period, they secretly devoted themselves for life.

The records of the Mission still possess a copy of the wording of these vows, the last lines of which are in the writing of Mademoiselle le Gras. It runs thus :—

"I, the undersigned, in the presence of God, repeat the promises made at my baptism, and make the vow of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience to the reverend Superior of the Priests of the Mission, in the Sisterhood of the Daughters of Charity, to give up myself during the whole of this year to the bodily and spiritual care of the sick poor, our veritable masters; to which end I

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pray God to help me for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ crucified, and through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin." (Signed) JEANNE DE LA CROIX.

Other measures were also taken to make the organisation of the Sisterhood more complete. M. Portail, the original companion of S. Vincent, and the one who more than any others had caught his spirit and knew his mind, was appointed director. Julienne Loret, a lively little lady with a good head for business and a good heart for loving, was appointed Assistant-Superior, and what in a religious community would have been called "Novice-mistress." But even the word "novitiate" was avoided by S. Vincent lest it should appear to betoken a Religious order. At that time there was no idea of a Religious community for women without strict enclosure. The word "religious" is, of course, very loosely applied now-a-days to almost any community living under rule and vows.

But S. Vincent said to his Sisters: "If you are asked, 'Are you Religious?' answer 'No.' It is not that you do not esteem them, but to be Religious would necessitate enclosure, and that would prevent you from serving the poor." Their cloister was "the cloister of obedience, not of stones."

So also the taking of the habit was done with-

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out any ceremony, so as not to give the idea of a Religious profession. The habit itself was not fixed for some time. At first the Daughters of Charity wore the ordinary grey dress of humble women. In the Approbation of 1668 it was still called "secular dress." They also wore a linen head-band to hide their hair, and the country Sisters added the picturesque white *cornette*, then the common cap of the peasant women of the Isle-of-France district, but some forty years later to be made the regular head-dress of the Community, now so well known and loved throughout the Christian world.

Here it may be well to describe another great work of our Saint, and one in which he was mainly assisted by his "Ladies" and "Daughters" of Charity. The official reports stated that some three or four hundred children were exposed annually in the streets of Paris. Some were rescued and taken to a miserable institution called *La Couche*, where an old widow and two nurses were supposed to look after them. The greater part died of hunger. These women, ignorant and scared by the horror of their work, rather than malignantly cruel, used to send the restless babies to sleep with laudanum and sometimes sold them for twenty, fifteen, and even eight sous to women who would put them in the

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places of children who had died through their negligence, or to beggars who used them to excite pity from the public.

Hardly one child had survived in the past fifty years; not one had the old widow attempted to have christened. One evening as S. Vincent was walking in a street under the walls of the city, he saw a man mutilating a baby for begging purposes.

"Barbare!" he cried from a distance, "I took you for a man!" This terrible experience decided him to undertake some form of rescue work for the poor little ones. He called together his ladies and described the state of things to them. They at once resolved to adopt twelve children and to put them under the care of the Sisters. A house was opened for their reception near the Church of S. Landry, and they were afterwards moved into the Rue Boulanger and four nurses were procured for them.

This new and important work involved a great increase of business, and a certain Madame Pelletier, one of the fellow-workers of Mademoiselle le Gras, was placed at the head of it.

But there were other even more unfortunate little children—those who escaped the notice

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of the watchmen and were never taken to *La Couche:* children who lay dying in the gutters and on doorsteps. What scene of more Christian action can we imagine than that of the old Saint who night by night, after his hard work, would wander about in the slums of Paris, picking up these little victims, wrapping them round with his cloak, and bringing them home to his Daughters: walking, so we are told, in perfect safety through quarters of the lowest repute, and bowed down to with something like adoration by the most abandoned frequenters of these haunts of evil.

This work for the little Foundlings was a huge undertaking and went through many vicissitudes, financial and otherwise, which we have not space to narrate in detail. Royal grants were made to support S. Vincent's work: the Ladies subscribed largely, though again and again they were almost overwhelmed with the expenses, which by 1644 had reached the sum of 40,000 livres.

Contrary to the wishes of Mademoiselle le Gras the Ladies obtained from the Queen the grant of the Château de Bicêtre,[1] formerly a hospital for invalided soldiers. There the children were placed, but it was some distance from

[1] Bicêtre was built in the reign of Charles V. by Jean, Duc de Berry.

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Paris and not well suited for the purpose. Meantime the expense rose higher and higher, and the distress caused by the Civil Wars and other disturbances, of which we shall read in a future chapter, produced a serious crisis.

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M. VINCENT AT COURT

S. VINCENT had seldom been to Court in spite of his connection and frequent intercourse with the mightiest personages in Paris. Richelieu had the highest respect for M. Vincent, the humble priest who never interfered in politics, except in the most childlike manner, who was quietly making Protestantism unpopular all over the country, who had set himself seriously to reform the clergy, who was solving social problems by the force of sheer love and goodness.

One day Vincent, oppressed with the thought of all the sufferings entailed by the perpetual wars in which France was engaged, went to the Cardinal and said, with tears, "Monsignor, give us peace, have pity on us, give peace to France." At which, we are told, the Cardinal was touched, and told him that he desired peace, but that it did not depend on him alone, but upon several other persons, some within the kingdom and some outside it.

It was therefore a surprise to the Saint when

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he was summoned to attend Louis XIII. in his last illness.

The King had always been a God-fearing man, and he certainly made a good and Christian end.

"It is well known," wrote S. Simon, "with what courage, what solid piety, what contempt of the world and all its grandeur (at the summit of which he then was), with what dignity and what freedom of soul, he astonished all who witnessed his last days, and with what foresight and with what wisdom he gave orders as to the Government of the State after his departure, the directions as to which he caused to be read out before all the princes of the blood, the great personages, the officers of the crown, and the members of Parliament, specially summoned to his chamber, in the presence of his Council."[1]

He arranged every detail of his funeral, and kept looking from his bed at the view of S. Denis, where he would be buried. He had a great desire to go to God in peace, and his choice of the holy M. Vincent as his attendant priest shows the sincerity of his penitence. It would have been easy for him to call to his bedside one of the many clergy who would have been only too ready to smooth the way into the

[1] "Mémoires of Saint Simon," vol. i. p. 68.

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valley of the Shadow of Death with soft words or flattery. Instead of these, he would have the humble friend of the poor people, who would speak to him the Word of God.[1]

"Sire," said M. Vincent, "*timenti Deum, bene erit in extremis*" (to him that feareth God it shall go well at the last), to which Louis at once replied with the latter part of the verse, "*Et in die defunctionis suæ bene dicetur*" (and in the day of his death he shall be blessed).

Vincent spoke to him of the gifts which God had given him as a King, and his Majesty, reflecting especially on the opportunities which he had had of appointing good men to the high places of the Church, turned to him and said, "O Monsieur Vincent, if I were to recover my health, the bishops should stay three years with you," meaning that he would insist that all those who were appointed by him to bishoprics should be compelled to attend retreats, or in some way put themselves under training.

A few days later he was sent for again. His Majesty was told he had only a few hours to live. He resigned himself willingly.

"How shall I prepare?" he asked.

"Sire," replied M. Vincent, "it is best to imi-

[1] For eight days M. Vincent stayed at S. Germain, continually interviewing the royal sufferer.

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tate the way which Christ prepared: submit entirely to the will of God in heaven."

"I wish it," said the King, "*fiat Voluntas Tua;* I say it again and again."[1]

M. Vincent was with him to the end, repeating the prayers for the dying, and the King expired in the act of saying the *Te Deum* with a clear voice. This was on the 14th May 1643.

. . . . . .

During the Regency of Queen Anne, a "Council of Conscience" was created with the object of advising as to ecclesiastical appointments. Vincent de Paul was genuinely astonished when the Queen sent a message asking him to belong to the Council. Her Majesty would take no refusal, putting her request on the very highest grounds and telling him that to consent would be to do a "service to God, and to the King, His son."

S. Vincent knew the perils of the Court life and how his conscience would require him to make a firm stand against notorious evils then prevalent. He was therefore very careful to make certain rules for his own conduct, in view of the new responsibility. He resolved never to go to the Court unless summoned there and

[1] Maynard, viii. 1.

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obliged to go, also never to ask any favour for himself or for the Mission.

Having once accepted the post, M. Vincent, as was to be expected, took a leading part in the Council. He prevailed upon the members to adopt certain regulations as to the disposal of benefices, regulations which they tried to evade, but of which M. Vincent kept persistently reminding them.

The principal rules were to the following effect:—

1. That there should be no pensions for bishops, except on their proper retirement through illness, age, or good cause, and that the evil custom of giving bishopric pensions to laymen should be abolished.

2. That at least eighteen years of age should be necessary for an abbacy: sixteen years for a priory or canonry: fourteen years for a collegiate church.

3. The system of *dévolus* or lapse of right, by which a person could be granted the next succession of a benefice, was to be regulated, though not abolished. The possessor of a *dévolu* resorted to all kinds of methods to induce the existing holder of the benefice to resign. M. Vincent insisted that due inquiry should be made, and no *dévolu* granted without searching testimonials and evidence of justification for the grant.

4. At least a year's priesthood to be necessary before a man could be appointed to a bishopric.

5. That no appointment should be made of coadjutrices of abbeys, unless there was evidence that the Rule was being kept. That only Religious of at

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least twenty-three years of age, and having been professed five years, should be appointed.

The mildness of these regulations is evidence of the terribly low standard prevalent in the appointing to benefices. One is not surprised when one remembers that even holy persons like M. and Madame de Gondy considered it quite allowable to look upon the Archbishopric of Paris as a sort of close preserve for their family. Still more astonishing is it to find M. de Gondy coming out of his retirement in the Oratory to plead for the appointment of his notoriously unworthy son as coadjutor to the Archbishop.

S. Vincent did the best he could under the circumstances. He was absolutely brave and outspoken in giving his opinions as to the candidates. No one knew better than he that the real evil that had been, and still was, like a festering sore in the body of the Church of France was the careless life of the bishops and priests.

He was resolved that he would have no hand in making the appointment of any man who showed no signs of fitness for the post proposed. Of course his counsels did not always prevail, and Mazarin, who was for the most part opposed to him, would often over-

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ride his opinion and continue the scandals if it suited him to do so.

But M. Vincent was able to effect a certain amount of reform, and at least to create an ideal of what those responsible for ecclesiastical patronage should aim at. He exposed himself to every kind of insult in carrying out his policy, but nothing daunted him.

On one occasion a royal chaplain wanted a bishopric, but having some scruples about asking for it point-blank, wrote to M. Vincent for advice.

The Saint replied expressing the hope that the young man would not apply for the post, but follow the rule of the Church, which forbade pushing oneself into preferment, and especially into the episcopal office: that even Our Lord, the Eternal Priest, waited until He was sent by the Father. To keep this rule would be most edifying in these days when it was everywhere broken. To put oneself in a bishopric would mean to burden oneself with a weight that would be insupportable.

The following story gives us an idea of the difficulties with which S. Vincent had to contend.

Mazarin wrote to say that a certain gentleman had asked for a bishopric for his son,

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and that the Queen proposed to give it to the young man in consideration of the services the father had rendered to the State.

S. Vincent knowing that the candidate was quite unfit for the post, a particularly difficult one, which had been neglected for some time, and fearing that it was too late to stop the Cardinal and the Queen from making the appointment, went straight to the father and remonstrated. He told him that the appointment of his son would bring on him and his family the indignation of God.

The father was much moved, and promised to reconsider it.

A few days afterwards S. Vincent called again. "O Monsieur! O Monsieur Vincent! what bad nights you have given me!" said the poor man. Then he represented to him the great advantages, pecuniary and otherwise, which would follow on his son's appointment.

M. Vincent said nothing and went away. The appointment was made, but very shortly afterwards the young bishop died.

Another young man whom S. Vincent had kept out of a living met him and said, "You are an old madman." "You are right, my son," he replied, "and I beg your pardon for having given you the opportunity of saying those words."

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Another story is even more remarkable. One of the Court ladies wanted the bishopric of Poitiers for her son, and to avoid too searching an inquiry into his qualifications, which under the Vincent *régime* was becoming uncomfortably common, she went straight to the Queen and asked her for it. The chief recommendation of the young man seems to have been that the family estates were near Poitiers! The Queen consented, but told the lady that she must herself go to M. Vincent to get the nomination paper. She went to him, but hurried over the interview to escape having to answer awkward questions. The next day M. Vincent called on the Queen and explained to her the true state of the case. He told her that this priest was frequently drunk, and that his family were well aware of it.

"They are right," he said, "in wishing him to leave Paris, but it is not to a bishopric he ought to go."

The Queen immediately withdrew her consent, but told M. Vincent that he must make peace with the mother.

The scene between the Saint and the Duchess is memorable. Calmly and earnestly he told her the news, and implored her to take it in good part. "The Queen," he said, "counts on your

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religion in this matter." She, on the other hand, lost all control of herself, and seizing a stool in a furious rage, threw it at S. Vincent's head. With the blood flowing freely from his forehead he left the room.

"See," he said to his companion who was waiting for him outside, "see to what lengths a mother's love for her son will go."[1]

Besides his efforts towards reformation in ecclesiastical preferment, we find S. Vincent using his influence at Court to remedy several other scandalous fashions of the society of that time.

But Mazarin, the greatest power at the Court, was against him and the "Party of Saints," as those who thought with Vincent were called. Had it not been for the Queen, who had a very sincere regard for the Saint, he would probably have been dismissed from the Court. This being impossible, Mazarin set to work to minimise his influence as much as possible, chiefly by only summoning the Council of Conscience on very rare occasions. Gradually it became a dead letter, and the last state of things was worse than the first.

1 Maynard, viii. 4.

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VINCENT THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY

IT is not necessary for us to go into the details of the wars of the "Fronde," as they are called.

It will suffice to call attention to one or two features of that curious episode, which can hardly be called "war" in the strict sense. The very name "Fronde," a "sling," was given to the revolutionary party in jest by a wit, by name Bachoumont, who said to some of them, "You are like schoolboys playing with *slings*, who run away when the watchman appears, and go on when his back is turned." The "Frondeurs" wore hat-bands in the form of a sling, and the nickname caught on.[1]

The quarrel began in 1647, when the "Parliament," which, we must remember, was not, like an English Parliament, a legislative body, but rather a council of judicial functionaries, made up of several courts of law registering the King's edicts, refused to register a certain edict which

1 "Mémoires," p. 185 (Nichol's translation).

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the Crown presented to them. On June 30, 1648, the Parliament presented an *Arrêt*, a kind of charter, which was an attempt to wrest from the Crown the powers of legislation, of arbitrary taxation and arbitrary imprisonment. The nobles, seeing in this movement an opportunity for re-asserting themselves after the tyranny of Richelieu, openly sided with the Parliament. The mass of the people, hoping to get some redress, also joined them. Mazarin had become unpopular, and it only needed this little spark to set all Paris aflame.

The Fronde was a reaction against the absolute dictatorship of Richelieu. "On every side was heard the cry of long-suppressed opinions, of newly awakened passions, of secular interests, and religious convictions." But the time had not come for a successful revolution, nor were the Frondeurs the persons to conduct it. They represented old grievances rather than new ideals. The Fronde was "the conflict of narrow aristocratic interests with the newly consolidated supremacy of the monarch. It was *not* the forerunner of the French Revolution, with all its hopes and promises of a regenerated time. The Fronde was the expiring struggle of the belated survivors of the feudal age."[1]

[1] Mr. J. Morley's "Oliver Cromwell," ii. p. 256.

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It must also be borne in mind that the whole of Europe was ringing with the news from England, the doings of the Long Parliament and the critical position of Charles I. But this little revolution in France was not destined to succeed like the one in our own country. The monarchy was far too powerful in France for that: the revolutionary party was disunited and half-hearted. The Parliament of Paris had no Cromwell: the nobility had joined the Frondeurs only for their own selfish ends and very largely as an amusement: the people were utterly weak and disorganised. Consequently nothing came of the Fronde but additional misery and distress, caused by the general dislocation of society. It was an attempt at a revolution which the Parliament commenced without knowing it, and allowed to fall into the hands of the nobility without meaning it. It practically increased the power of the Crown and led the way to the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV.

The story of the Fronde is the story of intrigue and treachery: violent opposition to Mazarin one moment, and helpless surrender to him again the next: one day he has to flee from Paris with the Court: the next day he is back again, and peace is concluded: then war breaks out again: then it subsides. The first Fronde,

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or "Parliamentary Fronde," came to an end in March 1649. The second Fronde, or "the War of Princes," raged during 1650: the third during 1651. Peace was made in 1653, and Mazarin, after going backwards and forwards, finally returned to Paris in 1657.

The period of the Fronde is interesting to the readers of the life of S. Vincent de Paul, because of the practical part he took in it, both as a diplomatist and as the organiser of the relief for the distress accentuated by the revolution. It is also interesting as showing us the kind of persons the nobles of France and their ladies were, from which class S. Vincent had drawn so much personal and pecuniary support for his work.

The contrast between what we read of the *Dames de Charité* and what we read of the grand ladies of the Fronde seems great, but probably is not so great as it appears. They were a light-hearted, good-natured set of persons, ready for any excitement. At one time it was the excitement of collecting money and the new experience of visiting the hospitals: at another time it was the excitement of "running a war." For the Fronde was a woman's war. M. Morin says, "*C'est aux femmes qu'appartient la Fronde. Ce sont, sous la Fronde, les hommes qui régnent et les*

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femmes qui gouvernent." The second Fronde was the "pastime of nobles, wits, and beauties." Everybody wanted a change. The barricades were built amid laughter. It was a *guerrette*, a mock war, a *guerre pour rire*. Everything was called *à la mode de la Fronde:* bread, hats, fans, gloves, handkerchiefs — all *à la mode*.[1]

There was no seriousness in the matter. The war was carried on to the accompaniment of balls and banquets, skits and squibs, intrigues and epigrams.

"Women," says La Vallée,[2] "played throughout this time the most splendid parts, which brought out all their clever wits: theirs was a life of adventure and romance, crowded with pleasures and perils: they took the lead alike in love affairs and warlike operations, in fêtes and conspiracies: never had they enjoyed so much influence in the State: these duchesses, beautiful, witty, dissolute, when they chose to play a part in politics, brought into public affairs their sordid passions, their narrow views, their frivolous ideas, and sacrificed to their vanity

[1] See "Card. de Retz et M. Vincent sous la Fronde," G. Morin, Paris, 1864; and "Mémoires," p. 185.

[2] Quoted by Dean Kitchin in his "History of France," vol. iii. p. 114.

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their honour, their peace of mind, and the welfare of their houses."

In the midst of this worldly society it is indeed a proof of the spiritual power of a holy life that S. Vincent and his immediate followers, both men and women, were able to move in and out, not only unscathed themselves, but drawing out so much that was genuinely good in the way of mercy, charity, and real sacrifice of wealth.

M. Feillet, in his interesting book "*La Misère au temps de la Fronde et Saint Vincent de Paul*,"[1] pays a high tribute to S. Vincent when he writes of him as the "visible Providence of all unfortunates," and adds: "In spite of the already firm foundation of his Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, one trembles to think what would have become of all these multitudes succoured by him during the horrible torture of the twelve years[2] (1648–

[1] This book is published by Perrin et Cie., Paris. The references are to the fifth edition (1886). This chapter is founded largely on M. Feillet's book, which is full of the evidence of patient and scientific research.

[2] The "Distress" period was longer than this, though it was more acute during the Fronde. The Thirty Years' War had made the provinces of East France the "highroad and battlefield of the armies of all the European nations." M. de Broglie says: "Pendant plus de vingts ans (1639–1660) Vincent de Paul fut, à la lettre, le pourvoyeur attitré, le grand nourricier des provinces de l'Est ruinées par la guerre, qu'il sauva grâce à d'immenses aumônes, distribuées en nature ou en argent par ses missionaires."—De Broglie, ch. x. p. 149.

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1660) with which we are concerned, if this old man of seventy-three years, bowed down with infirmities, and who had well earned the right to eternal rest by his well-spent life, had not had the happy privilege of a life prolonged to eighty-five years." [1]

Without any disparagement to S. Vincent, the same writer shows that there is good reason to think that others before and besides the Saint organised relief for the terrible distress in the provinces due to the wars which harassed France at this period. Charles Maignart de Bernières of Rouen, a pious magistrate, is claimed by M. Feillet as the originator of the movement. His connection with the Port Royalists explains the fact that his work has been obscured by the biographers of S. Vincent. But as the vindicator of his memory remarks: "The part which S. Vincent de Paul played seems to us so beautiful that we can afford not to refuse to others the merit which their works deserve."

In order to bring home to the public the prevalence of distress, M. de Bernières published a series of "Records," a sort of Charity Gazette, in which very exact details and statistics were furnished to attract subscribers and assistants.

[1] Page 224.

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We gather from these that large sums were spent and a great number relieved in Picardy, Champagne, and other parts. This publication was begun in September 1650 and continued until December 1655. The statistics were interspersed with Scripture texts, passages from the Fathers, and various exhortations to the readers concerning almsgiving.

But it was not long before the main part of the relief organisation came into the hands of S. Vincent and his Congregations, which were alone on a sufficiently large scale to cope with the crisis.

The high respect in which S. Vincent was held by all, and the way in which he was trusted by every one as the only person able to take the lead and do what had to be done in the time of distress, is shown by such letters as the following, sent by him to the Queen during the Fronde :—

"MADAME,—Paris was marvellously delighted to hear of the incomparable kindness of the King and your Majesty in desiring that corn should be imported without hindrance; but this joy has been followed by some measure of sadness, for the military will not permit the people to carry the corn, as I have witnessed, but attack the farmers who dare to approach for the purpose of harvesting. I earnestly entreat your Majesty to allow me to advise you, since you have done me the honour

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to inform me that the King has not forbidden those who have sown the earth to reap the fruits of it; and because I know that if it pleases his Majesty and yours to remove the opposition that is shown to the people, it will greatly help you to persuade them that you are more kindly disposed to them than they think."[1]

This letter, however, failed in its effect, and on the 13th January 1649 he made a perilous journey from S. Lazare to the Court at S. Germain to plead in person for peace. The position of S. Vincent during the Fronde was calculated to make him both suspected and respected by both sides. As a loyal subject and a courtier, he was bound to the Queen and the "powers that be": as one of the "Party of the Saints," he was hated by Mazarin: as a witnesser of the distress, he was in sympathy with the masses and earnestly desired peace: as head of the *Dames de Charité*, he was in touch with many of the aristocracy who were of the party of the Fronde. But this many-sidedness also enabled him to be a moderator and a mediator.

Accompanied by one of his priests, he started from Paris at midnight. It is truly astonishing to read of this old man wading through the floods, soaked to the skin, passing through the patrols at the risk of his life, with his companion

[1] Page 239.

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trembling with fear, and finally arriving at the palace. "Is it right, Madame," he said boldly to the Queen, "to cause a million innocent persons to die of hunger in order to punish twenty or thirty guilty ones? Think of the miseries which are being heaped upon your people, the ruin, the sacrilege, the profanations which the war is bringing in its train. And all this for what purpose? To keep by your side a foreigner (Mazarin), the object of popular hatred. But if the presence of Monseigneur le Cardinal is the source of all the troubles of the State, are you not bound to sacrifice him at least for a time?"

Before the Cardinal he was equally bold. "Monseigneur," he said, "yield to the demands of the moment, and throw yourself into the sea to calm the storm."

But it was of no avail, and with a heavy heart the Saint left the Court. It was unsafe for him to re-enter Paris, where his visit had been looked upon as an act of treason, and where the mob had suddenly turned against him, and had even attacked S. Lazare and sacked it.

He accordingly went round some of the country districts visiting his various establishments. At this period he fell seriously ill, and for a time took little part personally in the relief

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work, which, however, still went on vigorously in spite of all the difficulties put in the way. It is not to be wondered at that S. Vincent's strength gave way when it is borne in mind that at his great age he had been hard at work organising relief these many years, and at the same time living a life of great personal austerity.

It was very difficult to make him take anything for himself or even for his priests. When 300 livres were given him to buy a new horse, he gave up the money at once in alms. Money sent to buy food for S. Lazare was also spent on the poor. It was only after much resistance that he consented to drive about in a carriage lent him by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon.

The system of publishing "Records" of the distress was carried to perfection by S. Vincent. The *Magasin Charitable* or *Charity Gazette* came out regularly, containing, among other things, instructions by S. Vincent as to relief, with minute details as to the making of cheap soup.

The Missionaries and Sisters were planted all over the famine-stricken districts, and the whole management of the alms-giving was strictly business-like. The stories of it read like the records of the commissariat department of an army in time of war. Regular reports were sent in to S. Vincent from his subordinates in the pro-

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vinces revealing the appalling state of the people, some starving in holes and caverns: women and children sleeping out of doors almost naked: sick people lying in their beds without food, and too weak to come to the door to let any one in to help them: convents reduced to a diet of grass and barley.

The following is a specimen of the kind of official reply which S. Vincent sent to an application for help from the provinces. It was addressed to the Mayor and Aldermen of Réthel.

"PARIS, *May 20th*, 1651.

"SIRS,—I have received the letter that you have done me the honour to write, with great affection, and a corresponding desire to render you my very humble services. It was read to a meeting of the Ladies of Charity, in the presence of the Archbishop of Reims; every one was extremely touched by the suffering state of your town and edified by the goodness of those who are willing to contribute towards a gift of 50 livres which will be sent from here once a week. God grant that they may be able to continue it! The difficulty these ladies have in maintaining so great an expense is incredible. More than 15,000 livres a month is now going to Champagne and Picardy. I humbly entreat you to believe, sirs, that I shall do all in my power for your satisfaction and for the good of your poor, whether in the town or the neighbouring villages, for it is the intention of the benefactors that both may be visited and assisted by the priest of our Mission there, as far as

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the money given him will extend, preferring the sick poor and the most destitute to the less needy."[1]

The position of S. Vincent at the head of his great army of charity is best realised by reading the document signed by the King (February 14, 1651), which gives the protection to the missionaries of S. Vincent in their work. "It gives," says M. de Broglie, "an official character to Vincent de Paul, and constitutes, as has justly been remarked (by M. Feillet), *le grand aumônier de France*, a simple priest, acting freely and on his own initiative."[2]

"In the King's Name,"[3]—His Majesty being informed with certainty that the inhabitants of the greater part of the villages in his frontiers of Picardy and Champagne are reduced to beggary and utter misery, through exposure to the plunder and hostility of the enemy, and the transport and lodging of all the armies; that several churches have been pillaged and despoiled of their ornaments; and that in order to support and feed the poor and to repair the churches, certain persons in his good city of Paris give large and abundant alms which are most usefully employed by the priests of the Mission of M. Vincent and other charitable persons sent to the districts where most damage has been done and most injury; so that a great number of these poor people have

[1] Page 248.

[2] De Broglie, p. 158.

[3] M. Feillet publishes this important document for the first time, p. 246.

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been relieved in their need and sickness. But while this was being done, the military passing through or sojourning in the places where the said missionaries are at work, have taken and destroyed the ornaments of the church, and the provisions of food, clothes, and other things intended for the poor; so that if they have no security from his Majesty, it will be impossible for them to continue so charitable a work, and one so important for the glory of God and the relief of his Majesty's subjects. Desiring to aid this work by every means in his power, his Majesty, acting on the advice of the Queen Regent, expressly forbids the governors and lieutenant-generals in his provinces and armies, marshals and generals, colonels, captains, and other officers commanding his troops, both horse and foot, French and foreign, of whatsoever nationality, to lodge, or permit to be lodged, any military in the villages of the aforesaid frontiers of Picardy and Champagne; for which the said priests of the Mission shall demand from them safeguard to assist the poor and sick, and to distribute the provisions they bring, so that they may be fully and entirely at liberty to exercise their charity in whatever way and to whomsoever they please. His Majesty further forbids all the military to seize anything from the priests of the Mission or persons employed with or by them, on pain of death, taking them under his special protection, and expressly enjoining all bailiffs, seneschals, judges, provosts, and other officers whom it may concern to further the carrying out and publication of these presents, and to prosecute offenders, so that their punishment shall serve as a warning. His Majesty commands that copies of these presents, duly collated, shall be credited as the original."

The other glorious title of "Father of the

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Country" is given to S. Vincent by M. de la Fons, Lieutenant-general of St. Quentin, in the following letter :—

"The charitable funds which are by the grace of God and your care sent to the provinces of Picardy and Champagne, and so wisely distributed by those whom you have been pleased to appoint, have restored life to thousands of people reduced by the misfortunes of war to the last extremity; and I must bear witness to the humble gratitude of all these people. We have seen, in the week just past, nearly 1400 poor people take refuge in this town, during the transport of the troops, and they have been fed each day by your alms. There are still more than 1000 in the town, besides those from the country, who can obtain no other food than by your charity. The distress is so great that none of the villagers have now even straw to lie on, and the people of the upper class have nothing to eat. There are even some worth more than 200,000 crowns, who now have not a morsel of bread and have been two days without food. This is what compels me, in the position I hold, and with the knowledge I possess, to entreat you to be still the 'Father of the Country,' to preserve the life, as far as possible, of the poor sick and dying who are assisted by your priests; and *they* acquit themselves nobly."[1]

But the almost royal style of the humble S. Vincent as chief almoner is best realised in this sample Order issued by him in 1652 :—

[1] Feillet, p. 249.

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"I, the undersigned, Superior of the Congregation of Mission priests, certify to all whom it may concern, that, acting on the information given to me by certain pious ladies of this town, that the half of the inhabitants of Palaiseau were ill, and that ten or twelve were dying every day; and on their request to send priests for the corporal and spiritual assistance of this poor people, distressed in consequence of the residence of the army here for twenty days, we have sent them four priests and one doctor. And as we have been sending to them, since the eve of Corpus Christi, every day with one or two exceptions, sixteen large white loaves, fifteen pints of wine, and, yesterday, meat; and, as the said priests of our Mission have given me notice that flour and a hogshead of wine are necessary, I have despatched to-day a three-horse waggon, laden with forty-eight bushels of flour, and two half-hogsheads of wine, for the assistance of the sick poor in Palaiseau and the neighbouring villages. In testimony whereof I have written and signed this with my own hand.

VINCENT DE PAUL,
Superior of the Congregation
of Mission Priests.[1]

At Saint Lazare-lès-Paris,
June 21st, 1652."

We venture to give, in conclusion, one more translation of a note of M. Feillet's, in which he sums up the work of S. Vincent, which he so faithfully chronicles and appreciates in his carefully written book.

[1] Feillet, p. 251.

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"The more we study the history of pauperism and the charity of the seventeenth century," writes M. Feillet, "the more profound becomes our conviction of the importance of the *rôle* of Vincent de Paul and his influence on society; an influence unsuspected by himself. In fact, it was in him that society summed up, as it were, the wonderful outburst of pre-eminently lay charity in this century. It made him the representative, the type; and this humble name has been exalted above all others, even the most powerful. And yet the historian has difficulty in finding traces of his life and influence. The reason of this contradiction is easily explained; for S. Vincent de Paul never made of charity a thing bureaucratic, official, of whose doings record must be made; although, in that period of desolation and universal distress, he none the less acted the part of a real Minister of Charity: he was the administrator, the 'Grand Almoner of France.' Nearly all his foundations and establishments, formed to meet the necessities of the moment, have become permanent institutions. He goes on from day to day without any serious intention of founding a work for a possible future. His correspondence shows that in the development of his Missions in the towns and villages, he contemplates only the establishment of 'Charities'; that is to say, Associates willing to help the poor: and these 'Charities' necessarily revive or develop the hospital *régime*. In consequence of the bad management of the clergy, both regular and secular, of the decline of faith, of the long and disastrous civil wars, in short, of all the misfortunes of the time, the hospitals and alms-houses had sunk into complete decay, and were all but entirely abandoned. After the appearance of Monsieur Vin-

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cent, with the help of his Mission priests and his Daughters of Charity, little by little everything is restored. Only, the *rôles* are filled by different personages: communities of men are replaced by communities of women, whose hearts burn with the faith in God, and love of their neighbours, that has been extinguished in the men by the grave abuses of a long uncontrolled authority. Then lay society, awakened to a sense of its duty by the religious enthusiasm amongst the women, soon inaugurates the general hospital; then the public contributes to its maintenance; and henceforth, realising its duty, is ready with a new institution wherever a general need for it is felt.

"By the side of Vincent de Paul's efforts to assist the material needs of his unfortunate contemporaries, must be shown his care to preserve and strengthen the moral life of their souls; to elevate their minds, and to destroy ignorance and its dread consequences. There again it is by humble beginnings, imperceptible efforts, and without any anticipation of the result, that he paves the way for the great institutions which are to arise after him, to satisfy the intense desire for learning, which, since 1789, and especially since 1833, appear to have penetrated every part of society." [1]

[1] Feillet, p. 561.

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LATER YEARS OF M. VINCENT

VERY few men at the age of seventy, however hard they may have worked, will set themselves to start anything new. S. Vincent might well have retired, or at least have devoted himself to the consolidation of the numberless institutions which he had set on foot. But no! we find him up to the last inaugurating new work, breaking fresh ground with apparently much of his old vigour, and this after all the harassing excitement and wear and tear of the Fronde period.

S. Vincent was actually seventy-six years of age when he opened the "Hospital of the Name of Jesus." A pious bourgeois had offered him a large sum of money to devote to this work, the idea being to receive into a house some forty old and infirm men and to provide them with work.

Mademoiselle le Gras considered the proposal and made some very practical suggestions as to the work which the men should do. They must not be idle, but neither must they do useless

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work: they were to weave cloth for their own wear, and other materials, to make buttons and lace, to sew and line gloves, to make underclothing and supply the linen-drapers with goods, to make pins, &c.

She insisted that no money should be spared in the initial expenses of plant and material, and that the first inmates should be such as could make a good beginning and teach others.

The House was opened in the Faubourg S. Laurent in March 1653, and S. Vincent installed there twenty men and twenty women, arranging the quarters in such a way with the chapel between them, that, while the two sexes were separated, they could both hear the same mass or sermon. The Sisters were put in charge of the place and the plan worked well. Later on the Hospital was reserved for incurable men only, and has recently been joined to a similar establishment for women and transferred to Ivry, near Paris.

But, as was invariably the case, one work led to another, and the Hospital of the Name of Jesus gave the idea of a much larger and more important work which we must now describe.

The Ladies of Charity came to visit the Hospital, and the good order and practical usefulness set them, and especially their president, the Duchesse

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d'Aiguillon, thinking whether a similar plan might not be adopted on a much larger scale, which should aim at nothing less than the abolition of mendicancy and abject poverty from Paris altogether.

The ideas of the Duchess and her companions can only be paralleled by the proposals in our own day set forth in General Booth's "In Darkest England." Certainly the "Darkest Paris" of that day must have been very dark indeed. Out of a population of about 700,000 souls there were said to be no less than 40,000 vagrants and beggars.

"Wandering in the streets, often asking alms with a weapon lurking by their side, stealing what they could not get fairly, these wretches tried too often to get the attention of the public by sham infirmities, and would even come up to the very altar steps to interrupt the devotions of the faithful. At night they went over to a quarter called 'Les Cours des Miracles,' foul and infected regions of which nothing existing to-day can give an idea. . . . To penetrate this, one had to make one's way first through a maze of hideous lanes, dirty and suspicious-looking, then to go down a long winding slope, at the bottom of which appeared a sort of square, in which there stood in a large niche an image of God

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the Father, stolen no doubt from some church, and surrounded by some ten plots dug out in the soil.

"On each of these were crowded together more than fifty households: making for this single court 500 families and at least 3000 inhabitants. A hideous population, without faith, without law, with no morals, no sacraments, always in revolt against the Church and at war with society, 'a race of infidels among believers,' said Bossuet, 'corpses before they were dead . . . . reduced to the condition of beasts . . . . driven out, banished, wanderers, vagabond.'"[1]

The enormity of the problem did not terrify the Ladies. "A home of honest work, bread and gospel," that was the ideal of the Duchess and her friends.

S. Vincent thought it over and prayed about it, and finally consented, though there were one or two matters in connection with the scheme of which he never quite approved. The Ladies at once came forward with money, two of them alone being responsible for a donation of 50,000 livres and a subscription of 3000 respectively. By the intervention of the Queen a grant was obtained from the Crown of the "Salpêtrière," so called from the saltpetre works there. Here

[1] De Richemont, p. 283.

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the "General Hospital," as it was called, was erected, "one of the greatest creations of the century." M. Abelly, afterwards the faithful biographer of S. Vincent, was enrolled as master, and the work was entrusted to the Daughters of Charity. The Château de Bicêtre was also used for the same purpose, the Foundlings having left it.

But the management of this huge workhouse (for that is what it really was) was no easy matter, and the plan did not fully answer the expectations of the promoters. Contrary to the desire of S. Vincent himself, an attempt was made to force the poor into the hospital and other asylums. A proclamation was issued calling on all mendicants to assemble at the *Maison de la Pitié*, in order that they might be distributed amongst the seven divisions of which the establishment consisted. Large numbers fled from Paris rather than go in.

> "On n'a jamais vu dans Paris,
> Tant de gens si soudain guéris,"

was the comic couplet of the day describing this sudden exodus. Five thousand, however, did obey the summons. A rule was made that only Parisian poor should be received. The country poor were sent back to their domicile

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of origin. This grieved S. Vincent, whose heart bled for the country people, still suffering from the effects of the wars. But the rule was probably necessary, if any headway was to be made against the volume of mendicancy which had gathered in the capital.

The Saint was also much distressed that the authorities now forbade him to distribute food at S. Lazare, but under cover of a hard winter he managed to open his soup-kitchens again. It must not, however, be supposed that S. Vincent disapproved of this "general hospital' scheme. He seems to have given it a qualified approval, but owing to his great age, and also because it was organised on principles with some of which he could not quite sympathise, he did not take a very active part in its furtherance. Another hospital in the provinces at Sainte-Reine, founded in 1659, was more to his liking, and may be fitly called the last of the good works which owed their existence to his love and energy.

. . . . . .

All this time neither the Daughters of Charity nor the Priests of the Mission had received their Rule and Constitution from their founder. The Sisterhood had not even obtained full ecclesiastical authorisation. In 1646 S. Vincent had

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moved in this matter, and had asked the Archbishop to make the Daughters of Charity a Society under the direction of a priest. The prelate named Vincent as Superior during his life, and gave his formal approval. But the papers, including the deed registered by Parliament and the letters-patent of the King, were mislaid in a most unaccountable way by the Secretary of the *Procureur-Général*, and so the whole matter dropped for the time being.

But Mademoiselle le Gras was continually urging S. Vincent to make another attempt, and to get formal authorisation. It was probably in 1651 that she drew up a memorial to M. Vincent on the subject, asking for a written Rule, and to be definitely associated with the Priests of the Mission. Pressure was brought to bear in high quarters. The Queen herself wrote to the Pope in the highest terms of Mademoiselle le Gras as "*une bonne et vertueuse veuve.*" Cardinal de Retz was himself at Rome when S. Vincent at last made his request, and on 18th January 1655 the *Filles de Charité* were erected into a *Compagnie*, the rules were approved, and the whole put under the Mission. There was to be one Superior for both Societies.

It was on 30th May in the same year that M.

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Vincent made the formal announcement of this great transaction to his Daughters, thus :—

"Hitherto, my daughters," said he to them, "you have worked of your own accord, with no obligation to God save that of acting in accordance with the Rule which was given you and in accordance with the life which you follow. Up to now you have not formed a distinct and separate body from the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity; but now God wills that you shall be such that, without being altogether independent, you shall yet have powers and functions of your own. By reason of the praise that He has allowed to be given of your way of life and of your rules by his Grace the Archbishop of Paris, it is seen that He also wishes to bind you in a manner more strict than heretofore."

The Saint then read the words of the application he had made and the consent he had obtained, and then began to read the statutes and rules, making comments in places.

"Your Confraternity will bear the name of Sisters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. Oh, what a splendid designation! What a noble virtue! It is as if one should say 'servants of Jesus Christ,' since He says that what is done to His members is done to Him. He Himself did no other work than to serve the

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poor. Guard, then, my daughters, guard with care the title given to you; it is the noblest and most meritorious you could have."

Then he finished reading the rules, and added: "What you have just heard, my daughters, is what you have been doing for the past twenty-five years. You have accomplished this work without its being expressly laid down for you, for the late Pope recommended me to act so. Now you will do it because it is enjoined upon you. I have said before to you that he who enters into a ship for a long voyage must obey all the laws which are observed in navigation, or he will run great danger of losing his life. So with those who are called of God to lead the Community life: they run great risk of being lost if they do not keep the rules under which they serve. By the mercy of God I believe there is not one among you but has the intention of keeping your rules. But am I right in thinking so? Are you all of this mind?"

"Yes, Father," cried all the Sisters, falling upon their knees.

"When Moses gave the commandments of God to the children of Israel," said S. Vincent, "the people fell upon their knees as you do now. I hope that His infinite mercy will help you

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to accomplish your desires, by giving you grace to fulfil what He asks of you. My daughters, will you not give yourselves to Him with all your heart, keeping at the same time the holy rules He has willed to give you?"

"Yes, Father."

"Do not you wish with all your heart to live and die observing them?"

"Yes, Father."

A touching contest of humility between the Father and the Sisters interrupted this dialogue. Several of the latter accused themselves aloud of offences against the rules which they had committed, and asked pardon for them; and the Saint, accusing himself in turn before them, said—

"I pray God, my dear daughters, I pray Him with all my heart to pardon your failings, and I, who do not look to my own, I ask pardon of Him and of you also, daughters. How many faults I have committed in respect to you and your work! I pray you to ask God to be merciful to me, and I will pray our Lord Jesus Christ to give you Himself His blessing; and since my faults towards you make me unworthy, I will not pronounce the words of benediction to-day."

Upon this, the story goes on, Mademoiselle and all the Sisters, deeply troubled at the Father's re-

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fusing to give his blessing, asked him with so much earnestness that he at length granted their request.

"Pray God, my dear daughters," said he, "not to regard my unworthiness, nor the sins of which I am guilty, but to give me mercy and to grant His benediction to you when I pronounce the words." Then, raising his voice, he repeated in the majestic words of the Church —"The blessing of God the Almighty Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you for ever. Amen."

In this way came to an end the scene so memorable in the annals of the Community.[1]

It was a few years later, on 17th May 1658, that M. Vincent gave his Congregation of Priests their Rule and Constitutions, and having called them together addressed them. His words, which have been faithfully preserved,[2] breathe the same spirit of humility and simplicity that had characterised all his utterances throughout his life.

He hopes the Congregation has done some little good in the Church, but all the glory must be given to God. Theirs is a very simple Rule and a very simple life, but its aim is very great. They will be happy if they remain faithful. All the rules are Gospel rules and aim at the imitation of Christ, who was sent to evangelise

[1] De Richemont, ch. xiv. [2] Abelly, I. ch. xlviii.

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the poor. How blessed to do the same work as Christ did! "O poor but blessed rules, which bind us to the villages and not to the great towns, to do what Jesus Christ did!" "Jesus began to do and to teach." He practised virtues for the first thirty years of His life and only spent the last three years in preaching and teaching. The Congregation has been waiting thirty years: now they have their Rule. To have given them their Rule sooner would have seemed to be trusting to what was human. As it is, it has been all God's work from the beginning. It has all come about in God's way. When they began, they had no idea it was to grow to this. The whole thing seemed to him a dream.

"O sirs, my brothers," he said, "I am so astonished to think that I am giving rules, that I cannot understand how I have arrived at this point at all: it seems to me that I am always at the beginning: and the more I think on it, the more remote it seems to me to be from any human invention, and the more clearly I see that it is God alone Who has inspired these rules for the Congregation."

Then he made them kneel down, and gave each one the little book of rules, which had been printed. After which he blessed them, kneeling himself and saying:—

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"O Lord! Who art the Everlasting and Unchanging Law, Who dost govern the whole universe by thine Infinite Wisdom: Thou from Whom, as from the Source of their Life, cometh the actions of all created beings, all laws and all rules of good living: O Lord, bless, if it please Thee, those to whom Thou hast given these rules, and who have received them as coming from Thee. Give them, O Lord, the needful grace to keep them always and unbroken unto death. It is in this faith and in Thy name that, all wretched sinner that I am, I pronounce the words of blessing which I now give this Congregation."

During the remaining two years of his life S. Vincent frequently addressed his Community on the subject of the Rule, explaining it to them with his accustomed vigour.

. . . . . .

Before we describe the last days of the Saint, it may be well to picture to ourselves what was the ordinary day's occupation of this wonderful old man. We know the number of works which were under his direct supervision, none of which he ever neglected or ceased to guide up to the very last.

He rose every morning at four o'clock, and went at once to church, where he stayed three

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hours, saying his private prayers, his Office, and his Mass, all of it with the utmost care and devotion. This time of prayer he hardly ever broke into, however much business he might have on hand. All day he was beset by visitors from outside: all the evening he was occupied with those in the house. To each one he gave his full attention, as if he had nothing else to do. He had to go out once or twice a day on business, and as soon as he came in he would say his Office, an act which he always performed kneeling, even when suffering from great bodily weakness. Added to all this, he had an enormous correspondence, which sometimes kept him up very late at night. His biographer, Collet, claims to have studied no less than 7000 of S. Vincent's letters, and even after the destruction of many of the treasures of S. Lazare at the Revolution, 2000 letters are yet extant.

And all the time he was delivering courses of addresses to his missionaries, or his ladies, or his Daughters of Charity, besides other work which we can only imagine from what has already been narrated. Every year he made his own retreat and went through his spiritual exercises, never calling upon others to do what he did not do himself.

Yet if you were to congratulate him on the

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success of his undertakings, he would reply that he was only vile and worthless mud and slime, and that if God had employed him for all these works, He was only using dirt as mortar to join the stones of the edifice together.

Though he was of a good constitution, he frequently suffered from little illnesses, and once or twice from very serious ones. He took no care of himself, and even in old age scarcely ever allowed himself to rest in the middle of the day. He would sometimes encourage sick people, especially young ones, with the assurance that he had had just the same thing himself and was still alive!

"Never mind, my brother," he would say; "I had that same illness when I was young and I was cured: I had shortness of breath and I have it no longer: I was ruptured and God healed me: I had headaches, but they are gone now: I had a weak chest and a weak stomach, but I have come out of that: wait patiently, there is every hope that your illness will pass off, and that God has still some use to make of you."

The final illness of S. Vincent was an aggravation of a trouble he had had for some years from swellings in the limbs. From 1632 he had been obliged to ride a horse, and the figure of the old

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man on his nag was a familiar one in the streets of Paris. Later on, as we have seen, he took to a carriage.

In the early part of 1659 he was confined to the house, but continued for some time to celebrate Mass in the chapel and to give his addresses to the clergy in the Hall. As he could not mount the sanctuary steps, he was forced to put on his vestments and take them off at the altar, a practice which made him smile, because, as he said, it was the privilege of bishops only to do that!

In 1660, the year of his death, he was forced to give up saying Mass, but he regularly attended the Holy Mysteries to the end, using crutches to drag himself to the chapel. He would not allow the room next to his own to be made into a chapel, holding that such a thing was permissible only in very special cases, of which he considered his was not one. After much persuasion he consented to be carried in a chair to the chapel, and this was done daily during the last six months of his life.

He remained firm in his austerities to the end: refusing the delicacies brought him by his lady friends, saying that they gave him indigestion, and declining to sleep on a soft bed.

Even in these last weeks he was attending

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to business, writing letters, sending out his priests and telling them what to do and what to say, and delivering addresses of half-an-hour and more at a time. And throughout he was the same gentle, humble soul, with his smiling face and his kind words, turning every one's attention away from himself, and, if he spoke of his sufferings, only saying that they were as nothing in comparison with the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Seeing that his end was approaching, M. Vincent set himself to prepare more and more carefully for the last hour, though, as he himself said, for eighteen years he had never gone to bed without getting ready to die that night.

It was on Sunday the 26th of September that, on returning from his daily Communion, he fell into a state of stupor, from which it was difficult to rouse him for any length of time. One of the chief members of the Congregation came to ask him to bless the Community, which he did with great difficulty. In the evening the Sacrament of extreme unction was administered. At eleven o'clock he became weaker, and at half-past one in the morning he was once more asked to give his benediction to the Society.

"God bless it," he replied. "Monsieur," said one, "will you add a blessing for the members of the Tuesday Conferences?"—"Yes." "For

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the Ladies of Charity?"—"Yes." "For the Foundlings?"—"Yes." "For the Women of the Name of Jesus?"—"Yes." "For all benefactors and friends?"—"Yes."

One of the priests then recited the *Credo*, and after each article S. Vincent answered *Credo*, and kissed the crucifix he held in his hand. The priest continued: "*In te speravi: in Domino confido*"—"*Confido*" (I put my trust) he replied with a happy smile, and again kissed his crucifix.

Then to a good priest who was making his retreat at S. Lazare and had come to ask his blessing on the associates, he gave his last word, humble and trustful to the end:

"*Qui coepit opus bonum: ipse perficiet*" (He who hath begun a good work: the same will perform it unto the end).

Not long afterwards, at about half-past four o'clock on Monday, September 27th, 1660, he passed away.[1]

[1] In 1727 Vincent de Paul was made "Venerable": in 1729 "Blessed": and in 1737 canonised as S. Vincent. In 1885, under the present Pope, he was most appropriately constituted patron of all the charitable works and associations in the world.

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APPENDIX

The following dates in S. Vincent's life, with a few important dates of secular history, may assist the reader:—

1576. Birth of Vincent de Paul.	1576. Henri III. is King of France.
	1589. Murder of Henri III. Accession of Henri IV.
	1590. Battle of Ivry.
	1593. Henri IV. abjures Protestantism.
	1598. Edict of Nantes.
	1599. Marguerite of Valois divorced.
1600. He is ordained priest.	
1609. He goes to Court of Henri IV.	
	1610. Murder of Henri IV. Marie de Médicis, Queen Regent.
1612. He takes cure of Clichy.	
1613–1617. His first stay in House of Gondy.	1617. Louis XIII. assumes government.
1617. The first Mission. Curé of Chatillon. Confraternity of Charity.	War against Huguenots.
	1618–1648. The Thirty Years' War.
1619. Work among convicts.	
1624. Collège des Bons-Enfants.	1624. Richelieu admitted to Council.

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1625. Congregation founded.	1627. Siege of Rochelle.
1628. Retreats begun.	
1630. Beginnings of the Sisterhood.	
1632. Congregation approved by Pope. S. Lazare opened.	
1633. Conférences.	
1634. Dames de Charité.	
1635. Seminaries.	
1638. Foundlings.	1642. Richelieu dies.
1643–1655. Organises Missions in all parts, and Relief in distressed provinces.	1643. Louis XIII. dies. Anne of Austria Regent. Mazarin in power.
1649. His journey to S. Germain during the Fronde.	1648–1653. The Fronde.
	1649. Thirty Years' War ends.
1653. Hospital of the Name of Jesus.	
1655. He explains Rule to Sisters.	
1657. General Hospital opened.	
1658. He gives Rule to his Society.	1661. Death of Mazarin. Louis XIV. takes government into his hands.
1659. Hospital of Sainte-Reine.	
1660. His death.	

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